

“LIVED DIVERSITY” IN INDIVIDUAL
AND CORPORATE SPIRITUAL
DEVELOPMENT

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
August 2024

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ABSTRACT

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by
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The context for this project was Garfield Memorial United Methodist Church (GMC). In 2004, GMC was stagnant and in decline. From 2004 to 2022, GMC transitioned from a homogenous church to a healthy multiethnic church. The spiritual development among members dramatically increased. The hypothesis of this project is that “lived diversity” is the principal component in this growth. A series of interviews, questionnaires, and small groups, demonstrated that when “lived diversity” is experienced, individually and communally, spiritual development accelerates. Hopefully this project will serve as a meaningful resource for other churches seeking to grow from homogeneity to heterogeneity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the ongoing kingdom-building work of the Mosaix Global Network (www.mosaix.info). Thank you for your refusal to “settle” for so little and call it “church.” I have been privileged to be part of your team. The pages of this work are saturated with the lessons learned from being with you “in the trenches” in building the Revelation 7:9 Church on earth as it is in heaven.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my wife, best friend and ministry teammate, Theresa A. (Terri) Freed. We have been co-laborers together for thirty-three years in seeking to witness the Beloved Community in and through the local church.

ABBREVIATIONS

GMC	Garfield Memorial Church
HTH	Derwin L. Gray, <i>How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and the First Christians Knew, about Racial Reconciliation</i> . Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022.
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NIV	New International Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NT	New Testament
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Two segregated souls never meet God.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Jesus Christ has a trajectory...an eternal trajectory. This is what scientific theorists would call a “given.” That trajectory is illustrated in Revelation 7: “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, *NIV*). This is the clearest Biblical description of the gathered “Church” in the kingdom of God. Jesus did not say, “Wait for the kingdom,” but rather “Build the kingdom... on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10; Matthew 18:18-20; Luke 21:17). Herein lies the problem: The earthly Church and the lives of individual believers do not reflect this essential kingdom principle of including “every nation, tribe, people and language” gathered together. The communal Church and the walks of faith of individual believers remains far too segregated along ethnic and cultural lines. It does not resemble the “completely one” Church that Jesus prayed for on the last night of his earthly life (John 17:23). Jesus knew that a divided Church could not heal a divided world. This project seeks to create a holy discontent with this current reality.

The goal, in this case, is not to “scold” Christians into repentance simply by pointing out our collective failure as a Church and as individual believers to live into this Biblically mandated kingdom reality. Rather, it is to highlight what economists would call a “value add” for their own discipleship and spiritual formation. What Jesus knew and Paul subsequently illustrated was that when “lived diversity” is experienced,

individually and corporately, spiritual development accelerates. The term “lived diversity” in this project means “knowing” (see for example the Hebrew term *ya-da’* in Genesis 4:1, 9) diversity as a lived relational experience, versus simply understanding diversity as an abstract principle. The hypothesis of this project is that if it can be illustrated that “lived diversity” is in fact a crucial ingredient for spiritual growth that an affective change can take place in the hearts of individual believers and inspire in them a yearning for this reality in their personal lives and in their churches.

Larry Gogolick, owner of *N. Gogolick & Son*, is one of the most renowned jewelers and gemologists in the Midwest. In a recent interview, Gogolick discussed the four C’s of evaluating a diamond’s quality: Cut, Color, Clarity and Carat. Of the four C’s, he contends, “Cut is definitely the most important element.” The cut of a diamond is made up of facets, which are flat polished surfaces throughout the diamond. These facets are intricately cut by skilled diamond cutters to influence the light reflected and refracted back toward the observer. The cut and facets of a diamond determine just how brilliantly a diamond will shine. When a diamond is cut and polished to perfect proportion and symmetry, all of the light that enters the stone is reflected back upward. However, when a diamond is cut too deeply or too shallowly, much of the light will get lost, never bouncing back outward as it is designed to do. The angle and number of the facets can let light slip out of the bottom of the diamond through reflection and refraction.¹

¹ Larry Gogolick (Owner, N. Gogolick & Son) in conversation with the author, August 13, 2020.

This illustration is helpful in understanding Paul's declaration in Ephesians 3:1–13, a passage that Ernest Best calls the “most personal section of Ephesians.”² Here Paul declares that God's great mystery is now made known:

In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind... it has now been revealed...that is, the gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel... To make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church *the wisdom of God in its rich variety* might now be made known.” (Eph. 3:4-6, emphasis added).³

God's “*manifold wisdom*” (Eph. 3:10, *NIV*)—what one NT scholar defines as “God's wise divine purpose”—is revealed as Jews and Gentiles, historic enemies, now become one in the church for the sake of the gospel through the power of the Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ. The Greek word interpreted “manifold” (Eph. 3:10, *NIV*) or “rich variety” (Eph. 3:10) is the word *polupoikilos* (πολυποίκιλος), meaning, “diversified, many-colored, producing the sense of richly diverse, multifaceted.”⁴ Similar to the cut and facets of a diamond, the church is called to become more multifaceted and diverse, allowing the greater, more brilliant, “Light of God” (John 1:3–5; 8:12) to shine through. This has been the “gloriously intricate design of God's wise purpose in history... The overcoming of the barriers between Jews and Gentiles, as they are unified by Christ in the Church, is a pledge of the overcoming of all divisions.”⁵ Ernest Best states, “It is the very existence of the church, the church of Jews and Gentiles in which there is no

² Ernest Best, *Ephesians* (Edinburgh, United Kingdom: T&T Clark, 1998), 293.

³ Ephesians 3:4-6 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

⁴ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 188-189.

⁵ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 188, 194 (emphasis added).

division, that discloses the wisdom of God...The reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in the church is a kind of pilot scheme for a much greater reconciliation.”⁶

The church in her radiant, diversified and multifaceted beauty is now revealing God’s intention for the corporate salvation of the world. As believers witness this and walk in it as a church together, Paul prays that they may now “have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be *filled* with *all the fullness* of God” (Eph. 3:18-19, *NIV*, emphasis added). NT scholar Andrew Lincoln shares that, “The language of filling and fullness forms the climax... Believers should attain to that fullness... it conveys a movement toward a goal.” By “walking, working and worshipping God together as one”⁷ in this diverse and unified community of faith, “the process of being filled up to all the life and power of God will take place.”⁸ As God exists in differentiated unity in God’s revelation to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer), God creates a differentiated and diverse creation. When individuals experience lived diversity in their individual and corporate life of faith, their spiritual development grows more into the “fullness” of which Paul speaks (Eph. 3:19).

This project explores the seventeen-year journey of a Midwestern mainline church (GMC) that came to the place of embracing a holy discontent with the way things were and committed itself to an intentional process to grow from homogeneity and become a

⁶ Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, 325-326.

⁷ Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 67.

⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 214-25.

healthy multiethnic church. It seeks to address the current challenge of Garfield Memorial Church's (GMC) membership in remaining committed and connected to the mission of the healthy multiethnic church and reflecting a group of diverse people in pursuit of the Kingdom of God together. We will not ask them to do it begrudgingly out of a sense of "ought-ness." Rather, we will highlight and underscore the need to be part of a faith community like this in order to fully develop one's faith. Furthermore, this project will address the current and ongoing challenge of staying true to that mission to seek and represent what Dr. King called "the beloved community" in the increasingly diverse and painfully polarized society of the United States in this third decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter One details the ministry context in which this project was conducted. It is a rather unique context, one might say "least likely" place for multiethnic ministry and lived diversity to flourish in the Church. In Chapter Two, the Biblical Foundation for this reality will be set forth. Luke's vivid and lengthy description of the founding of the Philippian church and the diverse community in which it was formed will be examined. Here, Luke is painting a portrait of God's intention for the Church and individual believers then and now. Chapter Three researches the life of Richard Allen, one of the pillars of American Methodism and a "founding father" in the cause of Black Autonomy. A close look at Richard Allen's life reveals a champion of the gospel whose faith was born and developed in the midst of lived diversity. Chapter Four examines sound theological roots for God's intentional design for differentiated unity in creation and among God's people. This chapter focuses on an exploration of Trinitarian Theology. Chapter Five explores an interdisciplinary study outside of the faith community that gives

evidence for this created intention and design as well. The theory of the “Zone of Proximal Development” will be studied in detail. Finally, Chapter Six will share the findings of this project in the specific ministry context of GMC, demonstrating that lived diversity is truly an accelerator and advancing agent for spiritual development.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

On December 30, 2019, as the hours were counting down to 2020, *Time* magazine published an article looking back twenty years at the fervor surrounding the turning of the clock from 1999 into the new millennium. Much fervor was in the air over a phenomenon referred to as *Y2K*. This term was shorthand for a problem surrounding the upcoming year and the reality of “the two-digit format utilized by early coders to minimize use of computer memory.”¹ An American populace uneducated on the matter largely fell prey to ominous predictions of a technological apocalypse as the computer calendar shifted to 2000. Many Americans panicked and stocked up on food, water and even ammunition in anticipation of a potential crisis.

It is not that there was no reason for the concern; the American business community spent an estimated \$100 billion dollars in the United States alone to address this potential catastrophe. As the article notes, there was simply a lack of general awareness that “programmers were on the job.” Due to that community’s hard work and readiness, *Y2K* passed without incident. By the early weeks of January 2000, it was already being billed as a hoax and the efforts to fix it were characterized as a big waste of time and money. “But what if no one had taken steps to address the matter?” the article

¹ Francine Uenuma, “20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke—Because Those Behind the Scenes Took It Seriously,” *Time*, December 30, 2019, <https://time.com/5752129/y2k-bug-history/>.

asks. Peter de Jerger, a member of the computer programming community, said it this way: “We had a problem. For the most part, we fixed it. The notion that nothing happened is somewhat ludicrous.”² Paul Saffo of Stanford University states clearly: “The Y2K crisis didn’t happen precisely because people started preparing for it over a decade in advance.”³ Hence the apt title of the article: “20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke—**Because Those Behind the Scenes Took It Seriously**” (emphasis added).

At the very same time that computer scientists were addressing the potential calamity of Y2K, two social scientists were culminating their research on another pending crisis—this one in the American Church. In 2000, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith published the landmark work, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*. In the 1990’s, sociologists had begun to recognize and analyze the changing face of American demographics more actively. The rapid demographic changes in California, which was in some ways ahead of the curve, was instructive. The state that “used to be northern Mexico” saw Hispanics become one-fifth of the Californian population in 1980, one-quarter of the population in 1990, and one-third of the population in 2000. Sheryll Cashin notes, “Hispanics and people of color came to outnumber non-Hispanic whites in the state. In the lead-up to this transition, politicians... played to voters’ racial anxieties to win elections.”⁴ Another significant occurrence in the year

² Uenema, “20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke,” 2.

³ Uenema, “20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke,” 2.

⁴ Sheryll Cashin, *Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2017), 174.

2000 was the fact that the 2000 census was the first where individual United States citizens were presented with the options of *biracial* or *multiracial* to designate ethnicity.

In the midst of this heightened awareness of a changing dynamic in the U.S., Emerson and Smith extensively evaluated the American Church. What they discovered was that the Church in America remained utterly and systemically segregated along ethnic lines, even at the advent of the twenty-first century. Fewer than 6% of individual American congregations had at least 20% representation from ethnic groups other than the prevailing and predominant ethnic group. Worse yet, these authors concluded that systemic segregation in the American Church was (and is) a contributing factor to systemic segregation in American society:

These [conditions] partially generate and reproduce the racial fragmentation of American society; they aid the formation and maintenance of group biases, direct altruistic religious impulses to express themselves primarily within racially separate groups, contribute to segregated social networks and identities, help perpetuate socioeconomic inequality by race, and generally fragment and drown out religious prophetic voices calling for an end to racialization.⁵

The authors go on to contend, “well-intentioned people, their values, and their institutions actually recreate [the] racial divisions and inequalities they ostensibly oppose.”⁶

During a Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day event at Calvin University, Dr. Soong Chan Rah cited a 2005 report which noted less than 8% of churches fulfilled what he called Emerson and Smith’s “very generous definition” of a multiethnic church, consisting of at least 20% diversity. The study also revealed that half of those churches were “in transition.” The term “in transition” means that these were churches where the

⁵ Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 168.

⁶ Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 1.

ethnic demographic of the church's surrounding community had changed from the ethnicity of the congregation. The congregation merely reflected that change. Thus, half of that "less than 8%" were on their way back toward another form of homogeneity. In light of this, Dr. Rah contended, less than 4% of churches in 2005 were truly multiethnic at their core.⁷

In response to this reality, the Mosaix Global Network was founded by Mark DeYmaz (D.Min.) and George Yancey (Ph.D.) in 2004. "Recognizing the need to network thought-leading pioneers pursuing multiethnic church planting, growth, and development at the turn of the century," the mission of Mosaix is to be:

A relational network of pastors and planters, denominational and network leaders, educators, authors, and researchers alike, that exists to establish healthy multiethnic and economically diverse, culturally intelligent, socially just, and financially sustainable churches that express a credible witness of God's love for all people in an increasingly diverse, painfully polarized, and cynical society.⁸

Just like the network of the computer programming community who were "on the job, behind the scenes"⁹ taking seriously the implications, challenges and required solutions for Y2K, the Mosaix Global Network is made up of best practitioners in the movement to confront and address systemic segregation in the American Church and beyond. It was my great honor and privilege to come into this network in 2014 as a thought leader and consultant. Currently, I serve as Director of Coaching and Cohorts for

⁷ Soong Chan Rah, "The Next Evangelicalism and the Changing Face of American Christians," January 18, 2010, Calvin University, Grand Rapids, MI, video, 1:00:41, <https://vimeo.com/9302059>.

⁸ Mosaix, "Origin & Mission," Accessed September 9, 2022, <https://mosaix.info/about-mosaix/>.

⁹ Uenema, "20 Years Later, the Y2K Bug Seems Like a Joke," 2.

Mosaix. For the past seventeen years, Mosaix has been challenging the American Church's status quo on this issue, leading training and heightening awareness through individual and local church coaching; cohorts assembled by denominations, districts, conferences and synods; and national conferences and training events.

Just like *Y2K*, the clock is ticking for the American Church. The intensive demographic shift in American culture continues to challenge the Church in the United States to reflectively represent the immediate mission fields around them and—most importantly—the trajectory of the kingdom of God presented in Revelation 7:9. Failure to do so will put the American Church at further risk of becoming obsolete with a hollow message and an ineffective and irrelevant witness. In his final book, published the year before he was martyred, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented the continued segregation in the American Church:

The unpardonable sin, thought the poet Milton, was when a [person] so repeatedly said, 'Evil, be thou my good' ... America's segregated churches come dangerously close to being in that position... The church as a whole has been too negligent on this issue... It has too often blessed a status quo that needed to be blasted, and reassured a social order that needed to be reformed. So the church must acknowledge its guilt, its weak and vacillating witness, its all too frequent failure to obey the call to servanthood. Today the judgment of God is upon the church for its failure to be true to its mission. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. A religion true to its mission knows that segregation is morally wrong and sinful... Two segregated souls never meet God.¹⁰

¹⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 96-97.

My Story

I believe that God has uniquely prepared me for this sacred work through my own personal calling and life experience, academic training and professional vocational ministry experience. I grew up in an all-white suburban community of Youngstown, Ohio and entered into an all-white public school in 1968. A confrontation with the spiritual sin of racism, however, ignited in me an overwhelming hunger for the beloved community which radically refocused and reoriented my life at a young age.

During my eighth-grade year in the fall of 1975, the first African American student entered our school system. I had been active in athletics since I was old enough to throw, run, and shoot a basketball, which eventually led me to receive an offer to play Division I college basketball at the end of my high school years. This student, who we will call James, became a teammate on our eighth-grade basketball team. James and I quickly became friends and began to go over to each other's homes for dinners and sleepovers. My family had a membership at an area swim club and I asked my mother if I could take James there as a guest. When we arrived, there was a strange awkwardness at the front desk when we paid the young staff worker the one dollar guest admission fee. That awkwardness turned to aggression when a manager came out shortly after we jumped in the pool and poured bleach into the area where James and I were swimming. We immediately hurried out of there.

When I arrived back home and recounted the details, my mother sat me down at the family room table to have "the talk." She tried to explain what racism was, that it was not right but that it was in our country. She said that it came from our sinfulness and that it was not how God intended the world to be. I remember the feeling I experienced. It

was the combination of utter confusion and the feeling of nausea. The Gospel writer Matthew tells us that “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). The word translated as “had compassion” is a form of the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, which means “to be moved in the inward parts.”¹¹ It can literally be translated, “to have your intestines twisted.” That was my experience that day.

Later, in 1979, a business venture briefly moved my family to West Palm Beach, Florida. I entered my senior year at Lake Worth High School, an urban school where non-Hispanic whites (U.S. Census terminology) were a significant minority. In addition, Lake Worth was a national athletic powerhouse due to its sheer size of well over ten thousand students. I became the only white member of the basketball team, one of few white starters in the entire conference and the only white member of our All-Conference Team. The term “band of brothers” was a common sports idiom, but this was the first time I truly experienced it. It turned out to be my favorite team in the history of my athletic career.

On that team, I met Marcus (not his real name), who would become a lifelong best friend and brother. Marcus and I could not have been more different. He was black, I was white. He was a six-feet, nine-inch McDonald’s first team All-American center, and I was a scrawny five-feet, ten inch point guard. He lived in a low-income area of Boynton Beach, Florida. His mother had died three years earlier and he and two sisters had to move into a small home with an aunt who had nine children of her own. I lived in

¹¹ Bible Hub, “Strong’s Concordance 4697,” accessed on September 9, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4697.htm>.

the wealthy all-white gated community of Atlantis, Florida. Marcus was unappreciated and subjected to constant racism, while I was celebrated by the school administration as a kind of athletic “great white hope.” Yet, in spite of this, we were inseparable, on the court and off. Extended stays at our home saw Marcus more and more become part of our family. My mother developed a strong bond with Marcus and served as a lifelong mentor and parent figure (Marcus would go on to become an eighteen-year NBA All-Pro player and he insisted that my mother become his agent, as she was the only person he truly trusted).

After graduation, we moved back to Ohio. Marcus moved with us as part of the family. For my mother and for Marcus and I, the beloved community was not some utopian dream. It had landed in our living room. My father, however, did not embrace this disruptive new reality. Looking back, my guess is that he suppressed his own racism by accepting the fact that his athletic son who was chasing college hoop dreams would of course have black teammates and friends. But the thought of extending the borders of the immediate family to include an African American youth in any permanent way became too much for him to handle. Anger and frustration escalated to domestic violence and our entire nuclear family unraveled.

My heart ached (and still aches) over my father’s refusal to enter into the beloved community, and his overt hostility against the existence of it. At the height of this domestic crisis, I turned in desperation to our local church and our senior pastor whom I highly admired. There, too, I was met with unfiltered racism. I was chided for actually bringing Marcus with me to our all-white church. This pastor I had looked up to my whole life admonished me, saying that “every white person has been hurt by a black

person in our country.” I could not reconcile this with his gospel teaching, and this ended my involvement in church or Christian community. I thought that this fracture would be permanent, but God had other plans.

This experience became the launching point into my academic pursuit at Colgate University and beyond. At Colgate, I came under the tutelage of Dr. Coleman B. Brown, a descendant of abolitionist John Brown and a friend and colleague of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when the Civil Rights Movement came to Chicago, Illinois. Through the mentorship of Dr. Brown and my academic concentration in Philosophy and Religion, I went on a quest to learn all of the things that I was never taught in my predominantly-white suburban education. I pursued classes in Black History, Liberation Theology that had emerged in South America, Womanist and Feminist History and Thought, Native American Studies and Religion, Jewish Studies, and Studies of Islam and Buddhism. I was angered, saddened and astonished at all of the information that had been withheld from me. When Dr. Manning Marable arrived at Colgate to begin a department of Black and Africana Studies, I was his first student. Although he did not have enough curriculum to fulfill a major at that time, I became the first student to attain a degree in his new program, receiving a minor in African American studies. Like Coleman, Manning remained a lifelong mentor until his death. When he was asked to lead Race Relations workshops at various institutions, I participated and helped lead them.

Eventually pursuing my Master of Divinity at Princeton Theological Seminary, I became a student, apprentice and spiritual son to the ineffable Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, another pillar of civil rights and the historical black church. I came to Christ and was nurtured and empowered for ministry in the historical black church. My circle of

mentors and influencers grew in the greater Princeton community to include Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Peter Paris, Dr. Albert Raboteau, Dr. Toni Morrison, and, through my relationship with Dr. Taylor, the great Dr. James Cone at Union Theological Seminary. This unique training and experience produced in me a greater cross-cultural competence which would be crucial for the journey into multiethnic ministry and the ongoing pursuit of a manifestation of the beloved community in the American Church.

The American Church's failure to address its historical sin of ethnic segregation again became very personal for me in 1988. That was the year that I met my wife, Theresa Annette Freed (Walker). "Terri" is African American and was a proud single mother of a precious five-year-old African American daughter whose biological father had denied her. Terri was and is a passionate woman of faith who had also been wounded by the faith community of her upbringing. We were in love with one another, in love with God and completely disenfranchised from Christ's Church.

Having been raised in the Methodist Church, I began to reflect upon my Wesleyan roots. It was an important moment in John Wesley's faith journey when he encountered a very "serious man" who said to him, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven. Remember you cannot serve Him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them. The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."¹² This became a kind of mantra for Wesley throughout his ministry. Like him, Terri and I knew that we "could not serve [Christ] alone," nor grow in Christ alone. So we began our pilgrimage back to Christ's Church. Unfortunately, for an unmarried interracial couple with a child in 1988, when

¹² Augustine Burrell, "An Appreciation of John Wesley's Journal," in *The Journal of John Wesley*, ed. Percy Livingston Parker (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1951), <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/journal.html>.

only a third of America expressed any kind of positivity toward interracial marriage,¹³ this was a difficult thing to do. In fact, in some instances Terri and I experienced more hostility directed at us in churches that we visited than we did in secular settings. Our experience is borne out by research:

Studies of interracial romance have consistently found that those who support interracial marriage tend to be less religiously devout. Employing church attendance as a proxy for religiosity, researchers have frequently—though not invariably—reported that whites who attend church more often are less open to the idea of intermarrying (Johnson and Jacobson 2005; Yancey 1999, 2001) or even dating (Yancey 2007a) nonwhites, and particularly blacks.¹⁴

Further research contends, however, that there is one particular type of American Church where these racist attitudes diminish:

Recent research on race relations in religious contexts has argued that whites who attend racially diverse congregations exhibit more positive attitudes toward interracial marriage in general (Johnson and Jacobson 2005) and for their family members (Emerson 2006; Yancey 1999, 2001, 2007b) compared to whites who attend more racially homogeneous congregations... These scholars contend that multiracial church attendance provides opportunities for positive interracial contact, and thus promotes more affirmative attitudes toward interracial marriage among whites (Johnson and Jacobson 2005; Yancey 2007b). This research suggests that it is not church attendance per se that affects attitudes toward interracial marriage, but rather the racial composition of the congregation one attends.¹⁵

At the invitation of an African American female pastor, Terri and I landed in a small urban multiethnic church in Youngstown, Ohio. We were married in that church; and it was there where we were nurtured, developed and encouraged; and accepted our

¹³ Susan Saulny, "Interracial Marriage Seen Gaining Wide Acceptance," *New York Times*, February 16, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/16/us/pew-study-americans-more-accepting-of-interracial-marriage.html>.

¹⁴ Samuel L. Perry, "Religion and Whites' Attitudes Toward Interracial Marriage with African Americans, Asians, and Latinos," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 425-442.

¹⁵ Samuel L. Perry, "Religion and Whites' Attitudes Toward Interracial Marriage," 425-442.

call to full-time vocational ministry. Our experience of being estranged ethnic “outsiders” to the Church would prove formative for me in my professional ministry.

My Context

In my professional ministry as part of The United Methodist Church, I have served as Lead Pastor and led the transition from homogenous to multiethnic in two local churches. One was the oldest historical black church in Lorain County, Ohio, in a historically underserved urban setting. The other was a homogenous Caucasian church in an upper-income eastern suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Between serving these two congregations, I was appointed as a District Superintendent where I led a district strategy to bring diversity to an entire homogeneous district of eighteen thousand white United Methodists consisting of seventy-four churches in mid-Ohio. As part of that effort, we initiated and oversaw the planting of the first multiethnic church in the City of Mansfield, Ohio.

My current appointment, and the context for this project, is Garfield Memorial United Methodist Church (GMC) in Pepper Pike, Ohio where I have served as Lead Pastor for just under twenty years. When I arrived at Garfield Memorial Church in September, 2004, the congregation consisted of roughly 400 active members with an average Sunday morning weekly attendance of 204 adults and fifteen children. Of those four hundred members only 1.5% were Persons of Color. The church had a twelve-person staff of both full and less-than-full-time personnel with only one Person of Color, who served as the church’s custodian. By February, 2020, the church had over 1100 active members with a weekly Sunday average attendance of 600 adults and close to 100

children. Of the current 1100+ membership, 48% are Non-Hispanic White and 52% are Persons of Color. The church staff is now comprised of twenty-four full and less-than-full-time staff with 40% of the staff being Persons of Color. Garfield Memorial Church leadership has been told by national denominational leaders that, in terms of percentage, it is the most ethnically diverse church in the denomination. The transition from a traditional mainline white church to a mixture of a traditional and more modern multiethnic church has been both stark and sustained.

The geographic and cultural context for this emergence is significant. The city of Pepper Pike itself has one of the highest percentages of Jewish population of any city in the Greater Cleveland area, making it a somewhat peculiar immediate local setting for the building of a healthy multiethnic church. Even more importantly, this development is occurring within Greater Cleveland, Ohio. One of the most prominent and distinct aspects of Cleveland, Ohio's demographics is its notorious history as one of the most ethnically segregated cities in America.

As recently as 2015, studies led by the Huffington Post, *24/7 Wall Street* and the Martin Prosperity Institute at the University of Toronto listed Cleveland as the number one overall most segregated city in America.¹⁶ These studies track various demographic information such as ethnic diversity or lack thereof based on zip code and economic segregation where residents "sort themselves into disparate communities based not just on income, but on education and occupation as well."¹⁷ The studies found that "more

¹⁶ Aneeka Ayyar, "Cleveland Among Most Segregated Cities in U.S.," *the Observer* (Cleveland, OH), September 18, 2015, <https://observer.case.edu/cleveland-segregated/>.

¹⁷ Steven Litt, "New Study: Cleveland Ranks No. 1 Among 'Large U.S. Metros' in Income Segregation," *Cleveland.com*, February 23, 2015, 2. https://www.cleveland.com/architecture/2015/02/new_study_cleveland_ranks_no_1.html.

than 55% of [Cleveland's] population is living in homogeneous zip codes... Of the roughly 100 zip codes in the area, 63 are predominantly white and home to nearly 70% of Cleveland's white population. The metro area's black population is similarly segregated, with 30.9% concentrated in just six zip codes."¹⁸

Sociologists contend that Cleveland is not merely segregated, but “hyper-segregated.” Doug Massey, a Princeton University sociologist, dug into this term by evaluating census data in metro areas to observe “where the black population is historically unevenly distributed through a region. Instead, the minority population is slotted tightly into a specific geographic area.” Under Massey's rubric, Cleveland was one of the top hyper-segregated cities in America.¹⁹ There is a long, tragic history of racism and classism that created this demographic dynamic.

An African American journalist named Mark Reynolds grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and wrote an essay that opens with these poignant and piercing words: “Berlin had a wall. Cleveland has a river.” The Cuyahoga River flows into Lake Erie, effectively cutting the city into a West side and East side. Throughout Cleveland's history, the West side was for whites and the East side was for the black population. There are two predominant white groups of Clevelanders: (1) the “old money gentry, controllers of the business and political arenas... and (2) European immigrants... who assimilated into non-ethnic, all-American whiteness and gained positions of power in the police and fire

¹⁸ James Brausuell, “Cleveland Leads Index of the Most Racially Segregated Cities,” *Planetizen*, September 6, 2015, 2. <https://www.planetizen.com/node/80803/cleveland-leads-index-most-racially-segregated-cities>.

¹⁹ Vince Grzegorek. “New Data Map Reminds Us Cleveland is Hyper-Segregated,” *Cleveland Scene Magazine*, May 10, 2018, <https://www.clevescene.com/scene-and-heard/archives/2018/05/10/new-data-map-reminds-us-cleveland-is-hyper-segregated>.

departments, trade unions, and even the... Church.” As the black community began to grow in Cleveland during the Great Migration of the 1910’s, these established groups of white Clevelanders created what the author calls “the city’s intractable racial divides... [a] long standing... power imbalance between black and white, both politically and economically.” He remembers that during his youth, even while attending an East side integrated high school, it was made known in no uncertain terms that no African American dared cross town. He writes, “No black person risked getting stuck on the West side, especially after dark.”²⁰

The Martin Prosperity Institute report included the following ominous words about the resulting effects of this ongoing segregation: “It is not just that the economic divide has grown wider... it’s that the rich and poor effectively occupy different worlds, even when they live in the same cities and metros.” This report concludes with the warning that this segregation continues to strangle “upward mobility, the ability of low-income children to move up the economic ladder, and is positively associated with relative mobility, the gap between low and high-income children.” This rising inequality evident in American cities “threatens to undermine the essential role that cities have played as incubators of innovation, creativity, and economic progress.”²¹

This damaging trend is particularly alarming in light of the projected growth of the population of children on the East side of Greater Cleveland where Garfield Memorial Church is located, especially children ages 0–4. Children in this region in

²⁰ Mark Reynolds, “Black in the Middle: An Anthology of the Black Midwest,” *Belt Magazine*, September 1, 2020, <https://beltmag.com/cleveland-chicago-segregation/>.

²¹ Steven Litt, “New Study,” 3.

2020 were listed as a population of 120,914 — 100,930 of whom were ages 5–17 and 19,264 ages 0–4. While other population trends are decreasing, projections for children in this area is that they will increase to a population of 133,725 in 2030 — 95,842 ages 5–17 and 37,833 ages 0–4. That is a 10% increase overall, and a 50% growth in the population of children ages 0-4.²² If this area hopes to again become an “incubator of innovation, creativity and economic progress,” this history and reality of systemic segregation must be addressed.

Paul Hanson, SAGES professor of anthropology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, says it succinctly: “Cleveland’s biggest challenge is desegregation... The only way we can make a comeback is if this segregation process is turned around.”²³ This will take more than education and legislation, however. As Mark Reynolds points out at the end of his essay, there is a social, cultural and, yes, spiritual ethos that must be addressed. He concludes, “Berlin had a wall, but they took to it with hammers and pickaxes and tore it down. Cleveland... [has] walls too, but not the kind you can tear down with a pickaxe. They’ve been erected in places that are harder to reach than a river or a street; bitter, entrenched hearts and minds, both white and black, going back for generations, on either side of town.”²⁴

To this end, the Church and the community of faith can play a vital role. The Church’s tools for addressing segregation are not, finally, “hammers and pickaxes.” As

²² Demographics reported from *MissionInsite*: ACS Technologies, Florence, SC. April 2021, prepared for East Ohio Conference UMC - <https://missioninsite.com/>

²³ Aneeka Ayyar, “Cleveland Among Most Segregated Cities,” 1-2.

²⁴ Mark Reynolds, “Black in the Middle,” 6.

the Apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian Church, “The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4, *NIV*). It was in this spirit that Jesus envisioned the Church (the only time in scripture he ever used the word that is translated in English as “church”) and said that “the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

Changing Demographics

The witness and sustained health of Garfield Memorial Church is of consequence, not just to its future existence as a vital local church, but to the immediate health of Greater Cleveland during this time of local and national polarization and division. Indeed, the United States of America is in the final leg of a massive demographic shift which has produced even more acute and heightened racial anxiety. The results of the last national census in 2010 analyzing population data for the years 2000-2009 demonstrated significant changes. Once the 2020 census is fully analyzed, this data is expected to be even more pronounced. A review of the 2010 findings highlights the challenge for an ethnically-segregated American Church and the danger of its continued descent into irrelevancy.

Demographers refer to majority-minority states, cities, counties or regions, as locations where one or more racial/ethnic minorities (relative to the entire country’s population) make up a majority of the population. The U.S. Census in 2010 shared the following facts: Four states in the U.S. were majority-minority states: California, Hawaii, New Mexico and Texas. There were nine states where the percentage of white residents had fallen below 60% for the first time: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland,

Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey and New York. In the District of Columbia, where the black population had been in the majority since the late stages of the Great Migration, the black population fell to 50% as Asian, Hispanic and white citizens entered in increasing numbers from 2000 onward. Thirteen of the forty largest metropolitan areas in the U.S. were majority-minority per this report, and an additional seven reported a white population of under 60%. That is, half of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States are reporting a population of less than 60% white. Twenty-four of U.S. cities with a peak population of 500,000 or more were reported as majority-minority cities, one of which was Cleveland, Ohio. 11% of U.S. counties were reported as majority-minority with another 7% at the tipping point and “expected to be soon.”

Minority children were projected to be the majority of children in the U.S. by 2019, and in 2010 were already the majority in ten states: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada and New Mexico.²⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau projects that, “The U.S. is projected to become a majority-minority nation for the first time in 2043.”²⁶ The 2010 census also discovered the sky-rocketing rise of multi-racial children in our country since the 2000 census. As noted above, the 2000 census was the first census in U.S. history where bi-racial or multi-racial children and adults were able to identify themselves as such. The population of multi-racial children grew at

²⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Shows America’s Diversity,” March 24, 2011, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn125.html, and U.S. Census Bureau, “Most Children Younger Than Age 1 are Minorities, Census Bureau Reports,” May 17, 2012, [https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html#:~:text=In%202010%2C%20it%20stood%20at,and%20Texas%20\(55.2%20percent\)](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-90.html#:~:text=In%202010%2C%20it%20stood%20at,and%20Texas%20(55.2%20percent).).

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “U.S. Census Bureau Projections Show a Slower Growing, Older, More Diverse Nation a Half Century from Now,” December 12, 2012, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html>.

a much faster rate than that of single-race children. From 2000-2009, the multi-racial child population grew by 32% as compared to a growth of 9% for that of single-race children. The number of white and black bi-racial children more than doubled during this decade, and that of white and Asian bi-racial children grew by 87%.

Sixteen states reported a multi-racial population of over 200,000, with the top three states, California, Texas and New York, reporting populations of more than 500,000. There were nine states where the population of multi-racial residents grew by greater than 70%: Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee and West Virginia. An additional twelve states reported a growth in their multi-racial population of over 50%. That is thirty-two of fifty states recording a greater than 50% increase in growth of this national demographic!²⁷

The U.S. Census reported that this population of bi-racial and multi-racial Americans is now 2.1% of the entire population. Pew Research, however, differs with that report. Their research indicates that 61% of multi-racial Americans still affiliate with only one racial group due to racial harassment and stereotypes. They believe the percentage of multi-racial Americans as of 2010 was more like 6.9%.²⁸ The American Church ought to pay very close attention to the fact that in this report, 46% (nearly half) of multi-racial Americans are under the age of 18. By contrast, 23% of all Americans are

²⁷ U. S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Shows Multiple-Race Population Grew Faster Than Single-Race Population,” September 27, 2012, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/race/cb12-182.html>.

²⁸ Kim Parker, Menasce Juliand Horowitz, and Mark Hugo Lopes, *Multiracial in America: Proud, Diverse and Growing in Numbers* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, June 11, 2015), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/06/11/multiracial-in-america/>.

under the age of 18.²⁹ The struggle and sometimes ambivalence of the homogeneous church to reach and relate to this growing demographic presents yet another obstacle to be overcome.

Dr. Mark DeYmaz, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Mosaix Global Network, and foremost chronicler of the Multiethnic Church movement in America, has broken this movement into stages. He refers to the forty-year period from 1960–2000 as the “Forerunner Stage.” During this time, there were outliers and remote occurrences of multiethnic ministry appearing here and there across the country. For example, the “Promise Keepers” movement of the 1990s adopted racial inclusivity and reconciliation as one of its stated goals.

With the publication of *Divided by Faith* in 2000, DeYmaz contended that the “Pioneer Stage” of the movement began. He predicted that this stage would last for twenty years from 2000–2020. He writes:

Pioneers are usually not the *first* people to discover things. More typically, they are the first to recognize the intrinsic value and significance of something that others have only stumbled upon or taken for granted. Pioneers... are willing to journey great distances and brave the unknown, endure hardships, persevere in spite of opposition. In time, they are the ones who create new realities and change society. Indeed, not only do pioneers see what could and should be; they are blessed with a gift of discernment, seeing what *will be*. Consequently, they devote their time and energy to establish initial forms and functions so that others can more easily follow their lead.³⁰

For three decades, I have served in this movement. Montgomery United Methodist Church in Belle Mead, NJ, where I served as part of the pastoral team in 1990–

²⁹ U. S. Census Bureau, “2010 Census Shows Multiple-Race Population,” <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/race/cb12-182.html>.

³⁰ Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 25–26.

1993, and Asbury United Methodist Church where I served as Lead Pastor from 1993–1998, were Forerunner Churches in this movement. Garfield Memorial United Methodist Church has been a Pioneer and National Teaching Church in this movement, hosting well over one hundred and fifty churches in Learning Labs and coaching individual pastors and leaders so that those becoming aware of this movement might “follow their lead.”

Dr. DeYmaz predicted that by 2020, the movement would enter a new stage. Once the movement shifted the needle to the point that 20% of churches in America reflected Emerson and Smith’s definition of a multiethnic church (noted above), it would enter the “Early Adopter Stage.” The term “early adopter” was created and defined by Everett M. Rogers in his book, *Diffusion of Innovations*, first published in 1962. Rogers saw five stages of diffusion of innovation, whether they be in products, technology or services. He labeled the first stage as the “Innovator Stage” and the second stage as the “Early Adopter Stage.”³¹ In Economics, the term “early adopters” refers to individuals or businesses who use a new product, innovation or technology before others. Rogers states that early adopters form an “invisible college,” a kind of “informal network of researchers” who study and use the product, innovation or technology first.³² One business commentator states that “Early adopters face a high level of risk in that they are using a product or technology that may not be perfected... Companies rely on early adopters to provide feedback about product deficiencies and to cover... research and

³¹ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations – 5th Edition* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2003), 22.

³² Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 46.

development.”³³ In the marketplace, early adopters are willing to pay a higher price to be the first to try out the product or technology.

According to DeYmaz’s “chart of the multiethnic church movement,”³⁴ I have served as both a forerunner and pioneer leader within the movement. Looking specifically at those who were part of the earliest transition of Garfield Memorial Church to a multiethnic church, as well as the many hundreds who joined along the way, we gain a glimpse of some of the earliest lay adopters of the movement. Some have left, but many others have made a conscious decision to stay. These were the ones willing to pay a higher cost and take the risk of being part of a different kind of church than they had been raised in, had personally experienced or even heard about. They were and are part of God’s “new thing” (Isa. 43:19) in the American Church, something that has rarely been tried and certainly not yet perfected. They are the “invisible college” behind this project; the research and development team of first-time users to provide feedback about “product” pluses and deficiencies.

Rogers notices a common factor in early adoption. At first, he notes, the “curve begins to climb as more and more adopt,” but “eventually the trajectory... begins to level off.”³⁵ In the marketplace this can be due to many factors: costs, market fatigue, product deficiencies, oversaturation and / or overall success of the product where fewer and fewer

³³ Will Kenton, “Early Adopter,” *Investopedia*, May 4, 2021, <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/early-adopter.asp#:~:text=The%20term%20%22early%20adopter%22%20refers,innovation%2C%20or%20technology%20before%20others.&text=Companies%20rely%20on%20early%20adopters,the%20product's%20research%20and%20development.>

³⁴ Mar DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multiethnic Church*, 20-29.

³⁵ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 22.

individuals remain who have not yet adopted the innovation.³⁶ In my experience of leading healthy multiethnic churches, I have observed a high trajectory of enthusiasm, passion and energy as early adopters experience the joy and power of the beloved community, a foretaste of the Church “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10, *NIV*). Yet, there is a “leveling off” period in setting up more *permanent* residence in said beloved community.

The Gospel writer Mark tells us that Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Luke tweaks it by adding the word “daily” so it reads, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves *and take up their cross daily* and follow me” (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). This is the tedious task that these early adopters discover along the way. It is that “daily” never-ending work of laying aside things like personal preferences, personality needs and political persuasions so as to follow Paul’s command to “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility... look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). Thus, the current and pressing challenge for early adopters and for Garfield Memorial Church (GMC) is attrition.

G.K. Chesterton once wrote that “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”³⁷ Multiethnic church ministry has been found difficult and left untried by many and found difficult by those who do try as well. Further complications come from the current outside climate and pressures to give in and give up on this cause. The Greek word for “selfish ambition” used in Philippians

³⁶ Everett M. Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 22.

³⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publishing, 2007), 28.

2:3 above, and also in 1 Corinthians 12:12 and James 3:16, is the Greek word “*eritheia*” and is interpreted as “rivalry, self-seeking, feuding factions, strife.”³⁸ I heard Bible scholar and preacher Tim Keller interpret it as a “spirit of divisiveness”³⁹ It is hard enough to hang in there together across differences, let alone to do so in an era rife with a “spirit of divisiveness” due to political polarization, heightened racial anxiety, repeated and visible acts of racism and injustice, class struggle, a growing disparity of wealth, lack of civility in public discourse and social media continually bombarding us on all of the above every minute of the day.

Paul, the chief architect and missional strategist of the Early Church, prayed that we “may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:18-19). It is my belief that this prayer cannot be fully answered nor experienced in the homogeneous church. The walk of faith is difficult in the multiethnic church, but if we persevere, the multiethnic church is the place where we might best comprehend what *is* the “breadth and length and height and depth” of the love of God in Christ Jesus and God’s desire to build the beloved community.

Social commentator and race relations scholar Sheryll Cashin’s words about American communities can also be applied to the American Church:

The open, inclusive, integrated society we purport to have is an elusive fantasy except in the relatively rare multicultural or integrated islands among us. Even

³⁸ Bible Hub, “Strong’s Concordance 2052,” accessed on September 9, 2022, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2052.htm>.

³⁹ Tim Keller, “Humility,” sermon preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, May 23, 2010.

these are imperfect universes. But in these places people are dealing with one another. They are fighting the good fight, living the values of democratic participation more forcefully than most places, giving voice to often voiceless people in a context of competition, compromise and coexistence. I would bet on these places before the separatist ones. I would choose such communities and institutions, even at my own personal expense... because I know I will gain far more by living in an inclusive community.⁴⁰

I am “betting on these places” too, and one of those places is the multiethnic church.

There is much to be learned there, much value and spiritual growth that can never be found in “separatist ones.” It is worthwhile to persevere with the multiethnic journey of faith, even at one’s “own personal expense.”

⁴⁰ Sheryll Cashin, *the Failures of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining the American Dream* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2004), 82.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

This project is grounded in the Book of Acts and will specifically seek to exegete and explore Acts 16:11–40 in its unique context and within the entirety of the narrative of the Book of Acts.

Richard I. Pervo contends that “the story (of Acts) is told in the form of adventurous episodes.”¹ Acts 16:11–40 is one such adventurous “episode” that reveals much about the author’s reason for writing Acts as well as the mission and direction of the emerging Christian community that Acts calls the “Church” (Acts 8:1). Acts cannot be read in a vacuum. It is part of a two-volume work written by the Gospel writer “Luke.” Luke’s Gospel is the story of Jesus, who in Luke is “the proclaimer of God’s Reign” and Acts is “best understood as a sequel to Luke.”² Luke-Acts as a connected body of narrative and story is best interpreted within the framework of salvation history. Pervo notes, “What is more or less universally accepted: Luke’s principal theme is the continuity of salvation history... The continuity of salvation history is a governing theme

¹ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009). 397.

² Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 19-20.

that integrates the two volumes.”³ Jesus, in Luke, is the proclaimer and initiator of God’s Reign; and in Acts, Luke depicts and describes the Church living into and under that Reign. Acts 16:11–40 presents further understanding of the character and composition of that Church, according to Luke, and (even more importantly in Luke’s description) according to Paul.

This pericope’s unique placement within the structure and outline of Acts is important. It follows the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and the Council’s decision in dealing with the “crisis” of Gentile inclusion, just prior to the beginning of Paul’s first “independent” missionary journey.⁴ This placement is extremely significant and goes a long way in presenting God’s vision and intention for this emerging Christian movement. Luke’s unique writing style as a storyteller with particular narrative techniques is on display here. Whereas “much of Luke (the Gospel) teaches by telling... Acts generally communicates by showing.”⁵ This pericope will not simply talk about the mission of the Church but illustrate it in living color. An exegesis of exactly what is being presented in Acts 16:11–40 leads to a better understanding of Luke’s specific prescriptions for the Church.

Acts in general, then, and Acts 16:11–40 in particular, have a specific and timeless message for Christ’s Church and its members. Pervo observes, “Unlike the Gospel (Luke), which can be compared and contrasted with other Christian Gospels...

³ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 22, 20.

⁴ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 13.

⁵ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 13.

Acts is without peers in the New Testament.”⁶ In writing Acts, “Luke was interested in writing not only a Jesus-story... but in casting that story in a further mold... the still expanding church that Luke hopes to strengthen and build up.”⁷ Like a good artist, cook or craftsperson, Luke is presenting Acts 16:11–40 as a “further mold” through which the raw material of the emerging Church will be cast and shaped.

While the structure and outline of Acts has been interpreted in as many as four to seven sections,⁸ scholars generally agree that chapter 15 begins an entirely new segment in the narrative. New Testament scholar Joseph Fitzmyer states, “A leading question is whether chapter 15 is to be regarded as the pivotal point dividing Acts into two major sections.”⁹ When the gospel comes to Antioch in Acts 11, an enormous shift takes place:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:19-21).

Up until this point, the gospel had been proclaimed only to those familiar with the Jewish faith. Now, however, a turn is made toward Gentiles, “Hellenists,” completely foreign to the Jewish religion. One scholar notes this occurrence as “the most pivotal

⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 14.

⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible: The Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, First Impression, 2010), 6, 60.

⁸ See Dupont’s four section understanding and Betori’s seven section division for example in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 119.

⁹ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 21.

moment in the entire New Testament concerning the growth and development of the Church.”¹⁰

According to Luke’s more universal understanding that God’s plan of salvation shared at the call of Abram is to extend blessing to “all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3), this is a natural progression. For the Church in Jerusalem, however, this is an unfathomably disruptive moment. This becomes clear in the opening verse of Chapter 15, “Then certain individuals came down (to Antioch) from Judea (Jerusalem) and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Fitzmyer writes:

The peace that reigned in the church of Antioch is... disturbed, this time by Christians of Jewish background who come from Judea to Antioch and insist on the circumcision of Gentile Christians and on their having to observe the Mosaic Law... The issue that the incident in the Antiochene church raises sparks what is for Luke a very important development in his story of the early church. It falls designedly in the center of Acts.¹¹

After this expansion of the gospel message outside of the boundaries of Judaism and into the lives of Gentile families and communities, a meeting of the apostolic minds must be held in Jerusalem. The “Council in Jerusalem” is convened to address this new reality. C.K. Barrett notes that in the first part of the book, Acts 1–14, it is “undoubtedly true that Gentiles have been converted by the preaching of the Gospel... (but now in Acts

¹⁰ Mark DeYmaz, *Building A Healthy Multiethnic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2007), 20.

¹¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 538.

15ff) ...What next?”¹² The Council decides that no circumcision will be required of Gentile believers and that they will not be held to a complete adherence to Mosaic Law.

This is a pivotal moment that ignites in Paul his specific mission and calling as the “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13). Demetrius K. Williams writes, “Paul’s mission among the Gentiles scores a victory for Gentile ‘integration’ into the emerging community of Jesus followers. This event is in the center of the book, marking the pivotal event that would give the movement universal appeal.”¹³ Barrett contends that “This has the effect of setting Paul... free to pursue the [Gentile] mission without restriction: and with companions and assistants, he does so.”¹⁴ After returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas decide to initiate this new missionary venture by returning and visiting “the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing” (Acts 15:36). In Acts 15:37-39, however, a sharp disagreement breaks out and Paul and Barnabas separate. In Acts 15:40–19:40, Paul sets out on what Pervo calls, “the center and culmination of Paul’s missionary career... as an independent missionary.”¹⁵

It is at this exceptional moment that Luke inserts his long narrative of Acts 16:11–40 and the description of the foundation of the Church in Philippi. Just prior to this, Luke records in Acts 15:40–16:10 a journey through Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra,

¹² C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles, Volume II* (London, United Kingdom: T&T Clark, 2004 edition), xxxiv.

¹³ Demetrius K. Williams, “The Acts of the Apostles,” in *True To Our Native Land: An African-American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian Blount (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 234.

¹⁴ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-28*, xxxiv.

¹⁵ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 13.

Phrygia, Galatia and Troas, covering seven preaching stops in eleven verses. This is arresting as Luke is normally a detailed storyteller. He utilizes this narrative and rhetorical form of writing to “forge these [stories] into a single, coherent narrative and thereby create (rather than simply report) a sense of historical movement.”¹⁶ It is as though Luke cannot get his readers to Philippi quickly enough before he settles back into his normal form of literary style with an extremely long narrative in Acts 16:11–40 depicting the heart of this extensive missionary enterprise. In this “first independent Pauline missionary endeavor, Luke pulls out all the stops... the wealth of detail exceeds anything that has gone before.”¹⁷

Also of note is that at this juncture in Acts 16:10–17, Luke moves away from writing in third person to now recounting the beginning of this evangelistic work in first person plural.

We immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas... and from there to Philippi... We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us... When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us (Acts 16:10-16, selected).

Scholars refer to this and three other shifts from third to first person as the “We-Sections” of Acts. Joseph A Fitzmyer proposes three schools of thought for possible explanation for this. The first or “earliest” accepted explanation was that in these moments Luke is

¹⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 8.

¹⁷ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 400-401.

expressing “his personal association with part of the missionary journeys... of Paul.” This first appeared in the writings of Irenaeus who dubbed Luke an “inseparable” companion of Paul. Fitzmyer contends that might be an exaggeration but these sections could present Luke as a “follower of Paul” or at least a “sometimes collaborator.”¹⁸ A second proposition by some modern scholars — “usually those who find it difficult to regard the traditional Luke as the author of Acts”— explain the We-Sections as “memoirs or an itinerary record of an eyewitness report composed by someone other than the author.”¹⁹ The third and final assertion is that this is a “distinct literary form used by the author” for effect. It “gives the reader the certainty that he (or she) is learning firsthand about these things.” It makes “readers realize that in some sections they are in touch with personal recollections or eyewitness testimony... It makes the reader feel... directly connected with Paul’s life.”²⁰ If this third assertion is true, which seems most plausible, Luke as a writer is in essence putting this entire section in bold print as a way of saying, “Pay special attention to this!” In any event, whether this is Luke himself remembering his own eyewitness testimony, inserting the eyewitness testimony of another or changing writing style for effect, each and every explanation still points to Luke putting a high emphasis on this part of the story as important or even crucial. It highlights that what is about to take place is the beginning of a new phase or introduction of something of utmost significance, which the Philippian mission will prove to be.

¹⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 97.

¹⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 98-99.

²⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 97-100; all three possible explanations described here.

Luke sets the location as Philippi, which he calls “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony” and then adds, “We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer” (Acts 16:12–13). Why did they “remain in the city for some days”? Why the delay? This is somewhat uncharacteristic of Paul. For example, immediately after he and Barnabas were first commissioned, Luke tells us that “...being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (Acts 13:4-5). There was no waiting; they just went straight into the city proclaiming. What Luke does not tell his readers, but what commentators make known, is that there was there was one very important thing absent from this city. Unlike the city of Salamis mentioned above, Philippi lacked an established synagogue. Doug Paul points out that up to this point, Paul’s “missional playbook” has been to “start in the synagogue; when it’s his turn as a visitor to share, tell them the long awaited Messiah has come; his name is Jesus and he is the Son of God... then see who is interested in hearing more.”²¹ In this pregnant moment between “for some days” and “on the sabbath day,” one can almost envision Paul pondering a new plan.

Some have speculated that the absence of a synagogue could be due to the lack of a sufficient number of Jewish men in Philippi required to form a “minyan” which was needed to establish a synagogue.²² Strengthening this possibility is that later in the

²¹ Doug Paul, *Kingdom Innovation for a Brave New World* (Richmond, VA: 100 Movements Publishing, 2020), 20.

²² Doug Paul, *Kingdom Innovation*, 20.

narrative when Paul and Silas are brought as Jews before the local magistrates (Acts 16:20-21), they are accused of being “foreign agitators.”²³ In the absence of a synagogue, Paul heads to “a river where we supposed there was a place of prayer” (Acts 16:13). Irina Levinskaya notes that the word for “place of prayer” is *proseuche*, which often means “Jewish prayer house... But it is generally assumed that the word was not restricted to this meaning alone, and that it could also refer to a Gentile sanctuary, either as a result of Jewish influence or independently... In Hellenistic Jewish and later Christian circles the word was very popular.”²⁴ The women who had gathered there whom Paul and others shared the gospel with may have been Jewish or at least “Jewish sympathizers,”²⁵ often referred to as “God Fearers.” These were people who were open to and studying the God of the Jewish scriptures.

A woman named Lydia (not a Jewish name), who Luke describes as “a worshipper of God,” a term which is consistent with the “God Fearers” described above, is converted. At this point, she and her “whole household” are baptized. She then urges Paul and the others to make her home their new base of operations for their Christian missions. Pervo reports that Paul, “for the first time... founds communities based on household churches headed by gentiles.”²⁶ This pericope establishes a new pattern for Paul as he shifts from synagogue to house as the base of missionary activity. Similar to

²³ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 407.

²⁴ Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts In Its Diaspora Setting, Volume 5* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 213.

²⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 585.

²⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 400.

Peter's encounter at the home of Cornelius in Acts 10, this is a pivotal moment in the formation of a new kind of community as well. Now readers witness Jewish Christian missionaries staying at the home of Gentile converts. This clearly depicts that these Gentile believers are fully acceptable and included in the new forming community. There will be no second-class citizens in the emerging Church.

This is a pivotal and important message for the contemporary Church. The Church has had its own "playbook" through the centuries. In the American Church that playbook has centered around homogeneity. Yet as the landscape of American demographics have changed as shared in Chapter 1, could it be time, like Paul did, to re-think, re-focus and initiate a new playbook? In this crucial moment of the Early Church's move toward diversity and inclusion of all (not some), Paul departs from the tactic of starting in the mostly homogeneous synagogue of like minds and moves out into the diverse world of Gentile magistrates and God-fearing women by the river. This ever-widening circle is part of God's salvation history. Gentiles are not simply ministry receivers but now ministry providers, serving as leaders and "hosts." Luke clearly illustrates that this is God's idea. For just as "the hand of the Lord was upon" those who spoke the word to the "Hellenists" in Antioch (Acts 11:20–21) here, although it is Paul who speaks the word to Lydia, Luke clearly to point out that it was the Lord who "opened her heart" (Acts 16:14).

Lydia is the first of three "case studies" of engagement and conversion that will illustrate who will make up the body of Christ's emerging Church. The second encounter occurs with a young slave girl who has a "spirit of divination" and is being trafficked by

her owners for profit. The text literally says that she has a *pneuma pythonos*, “the spirit of a python.” Katy E. Valentine writes:

The Pythian spirit of Acts immediately calls to mind the famous oracle at Delphi which functioned from at least the sixth century BCE through the third century BCE. The foundational myth recounts how Apollo slew the mantic python snake that guarded the oracle, giving the epithet “Pythia” to the series of women who held the oracular seat at Delphi. The Pythia served as the spokesperson for the god Apollo and delivered oracles to various pilgrims. The Pythian spirit that possess the slave girl in Acts suggests that she functions similarly to the Pythia at Delphi as a spokesperson for the possessing deity. The identification of a Pythian spirit in Acts 16:36 does not substantiate Apollo as the specific possessing deity but rather alludes to the wider Greco-Roman world in which spirits roamed and interfered with human lives, conflating demon possession and infliction by the gods... The slave girl speaks oracles... through a possessing spirit in a recognizable oracular form, understood by the author and audience of Luke-Acts to be demonic.²⁷

These persons were sometimes called “Belly Talkers” and normally Greeks who were “pregnant with a god, a view popular enough to bring forth a vigorous denial by Plutarch.”²⁸ She follows Paul and his companions around for days (literally “Paul and us”— another We-Story emphasis) shrieking that they are “slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way to salvation” (Acts 16:17). “But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And it came out that very hour” (Acts 16:18). Luke clearly regards this as an exorcism and uses extremely similar language and form to an exorcism done by Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry that Luke records in Luke 4:35.

²⁷ K. E. Valentine, “Reading the Slave Girl of Acts 16:16-18 in Light of Enslavement and Disability,” *Biblical Interpretation* 26, no. 3 (2018): 352-368, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00263P04>.

²⁸ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 405.

Richard Pervo feels that Luke has inserted this story into this narrative also for some point of emphasis. “Although the exorcism of the slave woman could have a basis in tradition (perhaps not at Philippi), it is not typical and is likely to have been developed by Luke to suit his purposes.”²⁹ Framing these stories of demonic recognition of God’s power at work in the world (in Luke 4 the demon also cries out “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34)), could be Luke’s painting a picture of salvation history expanding through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, and now with Paul’s accelerating mission to the Gentiles. Fitzmyer notes that when the slave girl says continually that “they are proclaiming the way of salvation” she is divining “the import of the Christian message, using the distinctively Lucan *hodos soterias*, ‘way of salvation’ ... She thus announces a prominent motif of Lucan redemptive history.”³⁰

The third “case study” that Luke presents as encountering the power and proclamation of the gospel in this long narrative is the Roman jailer. His encounter comes as the result of the second one. The owners of the slave girl are incensed that Paul’s deliverance of the young girl from demonic possession has affected their income and they stir up what amounts to a “race riot.” “‘These men are disturbing our city; **they are Jews** and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe.’ The crowd joined in attacking them” (Acts 16:20-22a, emphasis added). Pervo notes “The owners were shrewd enough to mask their avarice with a potent brew concocted from... a dose of old-time religion and a garnish of racism. It had the desired

²⁹ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 401.

³⁰ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 586.

effect.”³¹ Without the benefit of a trial Paul and Silas are stripped, beaten, flogged and thrown into prison.

The jailer is undoubtedly Roman and almost certainly a former member of the military. Philippi had a wide-ranging military history as the colony was founded after “Octavian, the future Augustus, and Marc Anthony defeated the assassins of Caesar” here.³² Barrett observes that Philippi was a “place where discharged soldiers were pensioned off with land.”³³ Many civic jobs, like that of a jailer or warden in Roman colonies, were reserved for ex-military. He may have been a brutal man, possibly a racist himself. In regard to Paul and Silas, he is simply instructed to “guard them” (Acts 16:23, *NIV*), but instead he tortures them, taking these beaten men into “the innermost cell and fastening their feet in the stocks” (Acts 16:24). Stocks were not merely used for confinement, but also as tools of torture. Eusebius records that “apparently the victim’s legs could be more or less widely extended and discomfort turned thereby into severe pain.”³⁴ Luke continues his narrative saying that at “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25). Pervo describes this scene by saying, “Far from the groans and laments such injustice and abuse would justify, they gave themselves to prayer and hymns of praise, devotions that moved even the hearts of calloused criminals to silence.”³⁵

³¹ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 406.

³² Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 402.

³³ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-28*, 7.

³⁴ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-28*, 792-793.

³⁵ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 408.

What happens in response is the second miracle of the pericope: an earthquake comes strong enough to knock all of the doors off their hinges in the prison. This supernatural event again underscores God's hand in this expanding Gentile mission as a continuation of salvation history. One scholar goes so far as to say that "the open doors of the jail at Philippi were doors admitting gentiles to the faith."³⁶ Immediately, the narrative returns to the Gentile subject of "Case Study Number Three," almost as if the earthquake was sent just to awaken him! He runs out and observes the prison doors wide open, assumes all prisoners have escaped and chooses to take his own life, understanding "that punishment for allowing the escape would be an alternative worse than suicide."³⁷ Paul cries out in an authoritative voice reminiscent of God's voice to Abraham at a similar moment in Genesis 22:12: "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here" (Acts 16:28). The jailer had Paul and Silas' fate in his hands and he tortured them. Paul now has this Gentile man's fate in his hands and he shares the gospel of grace. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles even when unjustly imprisoned, as "the prisoner Paul delivers his jailer from self-inflicted death."³⁸

A new world is being born through salvation history and a new Church is at the head of it that will look very different from the one perceived and understood prior to the Council in Jerusalem. Antioch pointed to it, but in Paul's unfettered quest for Gentile inclusion in post-Council Philippi, we see it in its multifaceted brilliance. Reflecting on the three "case studies" that Luke presents in this chapter, interesting themes emerge.

³⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 415.

³⁷ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-18*, 795.

³⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 588.

First, there is Lydia, a woman from Thyatira in Asia Minor. Fitzmyer states: “Her name corresponds to the land from which she came, for Thyatira was in a district called Lydia in Asia Minor.”³⁹ She is clearly Asian. Luke is definitive in telling his readers her occupation (simply having a job or trade was no small feat for a woman in that day), and Luke tells us that “she was a dealer in purple cloth” (Acts 16:14). Barrett writes that Luke uses a “large group of compound words... [which] bears witness to the importance of the dyeing industry and of crafts and trades related to it.”⁴⁰ Purple was a high-end color worn by people of means, including royalty. Fitzmyer states that “the noun *porphyra*, ‘purple’ denoted actually the shellfish (*Murex trunculus*), from which one form of the ancient precious dye was obtained.”⁴¹ While this particular practice was more directly associated in the dyeing industry in Tyre and Thyatira it was more associated with dye from the “madder root” or “*rubia*,” Luke certainly implies that she was a “sort of commercial traveler” who visited Philippi regularly, had a home there, was familiar with the “place of prayer” and had possibly “opened a retail establishment.”⁴² Pervo observes that, “She was the head of her household... It is likely that she is to be perceived as single, divorced, or widowed... operates a business... and a person of some means.”⁴³ “A fragmentary Latin inscription from Philippi appears to refer to dealers in purple,” and is described in the “feminine form... and thus confirms the activity of women in this

³⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 585.

⁴⁰ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-18*, 782.

⁴¹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 585.

⁴² C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-18*, 782.

⁴³ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 403.

business.”⁴⁴ Lydia could be compared to a modern-day Fashion CEO, with enough means to eat at the finest restaurants, with a condominium in her home country and house in her country of business.

The slave girl, discussed in detail above, was almost undoubtedly Greek. Fitzmyer writes, “‘*Paidiske*,’” fem. diminutive of *pais*, ‘child,’ was often used to denote a slave in a Greek household.”⁴⁵ To say, as one scholar does, that “This slave-girl is a contrast to the well-to-do Lydia,”⁴⁶ is an extreme understatement. She has no position, power or privilege. She is trafficked and utterly exploited by evil, manipulative men who cared only about her ability to provide “much profit for her masters” (Acts 16:16). She has no voice except the one that was misused to attract “gullible people to pay for her services.”⁴⁷ She has no capability to join the women by the river at the “place of prayer” and calmly “sit down and listen with those gathered there” (Acts 16:13); instead, she is detained in the streets and shrieking. She has bad masters on the outside and a bad master on the inside and is in utter torment and destitute. In fact, after her encounter with Paul she literally disappears from the narrative. Katy E. Valentine notes:

Slaves were likely to experience disability due to violence, and disabled slaves were at an elevated risk. The slave girl in Acts 16:16-18 is in a particular bind. She is a slave possessed by a demon, and she occupies a unique place of enslavement... Her oracular visions make the slave girl desirable, not dissimilar to slaves with unusual physiognomic features that also had a high value for Roman entertainment. As a narrative prosthesis, the slave girl makes an

⁴⁴ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary*, 782.

⁴⁵ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 586.

⁴⁶ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 404.

⁴⁷ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, 586.

appearance, showcases her disability, and then disappears. Once her disability is removed, she vanishes from the text.⁴⁸

If Lydia is analogous to a contemporary Fashion CEO, the slave girl is a contemporary sex-trafficked teenager who is utterly powerless, abused and overlooked. At best, she might be able to seek scraps from the dumpsters near the restaurants that modern-day Lydias tend to frequent. One would like to believe that she was taken in by the Philippian Church and ended up at table in Lydia's home. Valentine contends "Some scholars have attempted to rescue the slave girl by suggesting that she converted to Christianity and was thus cared for by the community; they are, in my view, overly optimistic."⁴⁹ Yet, history may be more optimistic on this point. The Early Christian Community's inclusion and rescue of women, typically abandoned by the pagan world, is well recorded.⁵⁰ Therefore, this vision of Lydia and the Greek slave girl as members of the Christian community gathered in Lydia's house may well be more fact than fable.

In combining these two case studies with the case of the jailer detailed above, an unlikely worldly trio emerges. In modern terms the jailer can be compared to an ex-G.I. known to head off to the local V.F.W. after work. These three are different in every way. They are of different ethnic groups: Asian, Greek and Roman. This demonstrates that Luke's "message embraces all ethnic diversity in the Roman empire."⁵¹ They are of

⁴⁸ K. E. Valentine, "Reading the Slave Girl of Acts 16:16-18," 366-367.

⁴⁹ K. E. Valentine, "Reading the Slave Girl of Acts 16:16-18," 366.

⁵⁰ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 95-128.

⁵¹ Demetrius K. Williams, "The Acts of the Apostles" in *True to Our Native Land: An African-American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian Blount (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 214.

different economic and social strata. William Willimon notes the conversion of Lydia and her inclusion as a foundational figure in the formation of this church as a “person of means” is noteworthy, especially in light of the fact that “In the opening of his Gospel, in Mary’s *Magnificat* (Luke 1:51-53), Luke sounds a warning to the rich. Throughout both the Gospel and Acts, Luke portrays possessions as a special danger.” Yet, also in Luke’s Gospel:

Jesus redeemed the wealthy Zacchaeus... Cornelius the first gentile convert, is depicted as a philanthropist (Acts 10:2), and now a rich woman named Lydia demonstrates her conversion through hospitality... This mixing of classes is particularly interesting, given the context of the Roman world where there was virtually no movement out of the social class to which one was born nor any expectation of movement... Acts’ picture of relaxed familiarity and warm hospitality between social classes in the church would not have been missed by Luke’s readers.⁵²

While these three encounters cannot have been the only encounters in the formation of the Philippian Church, Luke highlights them as foundational to it. This cannot be accidental. Luke is too good of a storyteller to let that happen, and storytelling is his main narrative vehicle for depicting his message. Pervo states that Luke “is a painter rather than a photographer”⁵³ and in this portrait of diversity he is illustrating the Church that is emerging under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Luke is clear throughout Acts that, ‘The Spirit rules the church; the church does not control the Spirit.’⁵⁴ The Spirit is the driving eschatological force of Post-Resurrection salvation history. Pervo writes, “Jesus had sent the Spirit so as to bring into being a renewed Israel, soon to be

⁵² William H. Willimon, *Interpretation: Acts* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 137-138.

⁵³ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 9.

⁵⁴ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 29.

enriched by the addition of the Gentiles. Jesus... thus brought salvation to the mixed community... [The Church] was an eschatological entity living within the period of fulfillment initiated by... the Spirit and awaiting its end.”⁵⁵

The Church’s “end” is depicted at the Parousia as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9, *NIV*). Luke is clearly demonstrating in his narrative that what was begun by the events in Antioch, endorsed by the Council in Jerusalem and now unfettered by Jewish law and religiosity, is obliterating all human boundaries in Philippi. He depicts Christ’s intention for the Revelation 7:9 Church to exist as “[God’s] kingdom come, [God’s] will being done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10, *NIV*).

“So far as Acts makes a specific contribution to the theology of the New Testament this is to be found not so much in the treatment of particular doctrines as in an understanding of the possibility of Christian history and especially of the Christian mission.”⁵⁶ In this long narrative about the formation of the Church at Philippi, Luke is expanding the possibilities for the Christian mission in fantastic ways. One scholar describes Luke’s writing style as “to evoke atmosphere with a single deft stroke.”⁵⁷ In this lengthy and action-packed narrative, Luke is evoking an atmosphere never seen or witnessed before. Paul is the messenger creating this atmosphere, but God via the Spirit is clearly the architect. When Luke goes to extensive length to present this diverse

⁵⁵ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, lxxxvii.

⁵⁶ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-28*, lxxxii.

⁵⁷ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 8-9.

Christian community being formed by the proclamation and power of the gospel, it is an indirect prescription for the now and future Church.

To return to Luke as “painter,” he is clearly imaging his belief that this is what the Church should and must look like in the “fullness” of its being. In these three “case studies” the question is implied, “Where in the world do these three groups of people get together?!” Luke’s answer is, “In the Christian Church.” The fact that this specific church in Philippi was the one Paul eventually addressed in his Letter to the Philippians should not be lost upon the readers of Acts. The general tenor of that epistle is overwhelmingly positive. The Philippian Church is not corrected or rebuked, which are characteristics of other Pauline letters, making it distinct among all of Paul’s epistles. It is also a church community that Paul uses as a model for others in writing about their generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-8). If the early Christian community, and especially Paul with Luke among his likely companions, viewed this church in such a positive light, it only gives further evidence to support the possibility that in Acts 16:11–40 Luke is in some ways setting the “gold standard” for the Church. Barrett notes that “as hearers accepted the word... they found themselves gathered into believing companies and shared common life.”⁵⁸ Per Luke, the Church and the “common life” together must include persons of extremely diverse ethnic, economic, gender, social and religious backgrounds. Possibly the starkest illustration of this truth is the fact that there is good evidence that, as the Pharisee Saul, Paul’s pre-Christ self, would have said the “blessings of identity” prior to daily morning prayers. This blessing went as follows: “I thank you God that I am not a

⁵⁸ C. K. Barrett, *International Critical Commentary, Acts 15-28*, lxxxiii.

woman, a slave or a gentile.”⁵⁹ Now, Paul the evangelist founds one of his healthiest churches in Philippi with three of its foundational members being a woman, a slave and a gentile!

Pervo concludes that “Acts certainly seeks to legitimate a social body comprising both ‘Jews’ and gentiles, and to do so by the erection and maintenance of a *symbolic universe*.”⁶⁰ In Philippi, we are seeing this “universe” being “erected” under the direction of the Holy Spirit, while Luke is passing on the work of its maintenance to his readers. This passage underscores God’s intention for all to grow spiritually in diverse communities through our lived experience of being part of Christ’s Church. Lived diversity was a foundational component of this Church and this is vividly illustrated by Luke in Philippi.

⁵⁹ See for example, Boston College Center for Christian-Jewish Learning, https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/sourcebook/shelo_asani_goy.htm.

⁶⁰ Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts*, 22 (emphasis added).

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Richard Allen was one of the most consequential leaders in original American Methodism. Allen and fellow Methodist preacher, Harry Hoosier, were the only two leaders of color present at the foundational “Christmas Conference” in Baltimore in December, 1784. Denis Dickerson observes that this conference “formally organized the Methodist denomination in the United States.... Allen, who witnessed the consecration of [Francis] Asbury and [Thomas] Coke as [the first American] bishops, joined them as members of the founding generation of the Methodist Church in America.”¹ Subsequently, Allen and Asbury would remain friends and colleagues throughout their lives.

Given that the Methodist movement in America in the eighteenth century was an instrumental part of the Great Awakening and its bearing upon early American society and identity, it can be argued that Richard Allen was a chief engineer of American religious history. Within that framework, he certainly was one of its most influential African American leaders. One historian states: “Richard Allen was one of the most

¹ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 30.

gifted Americans of his generation.”² At a celebration of his birthday in Philadelphia, on February 14, 1865, thirty-four years after his death and less than two months prior to the end of the American Civil War, Bishop A. Wyman declared, “Rome had her Caesar... Germany her illustrious Luther... America her Washington, Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln.” African Americans could proudly offer their own “illustrious hero” in the vaunted Allen.³

None other than American reformer Frederick Douglass looked to Allen as a beacon of light and inspiration. In September 1893, he lifted up Allen’s legacy at the Chicago World’s Fair:

Douglass called Allen nothing less than the author of a ‘new Declaration of Independence... Among the remarkable men whose names have found deserved place in American annals... there is not one who will be longer remembered or whose memory will be more sacredly cherished by coming generations... than will the name and character of Richard Allen.’⁴

When Frederick Douglass had to pick a birthday for himself as an adult since there was no record available to him as to his slave birth, he chose Richard Allen’s February fourteenth birthday as his own.

Allen ultimately became the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Dickerson notes that, “In 1903, W. E. B. DuBois, hardly a denominational partisan, described ‘the great African Methodist Church’ as ‘the greatest Negro organization in the

² Gary B. Nash, “New Light on Richard Allen: The Early Years of Freedom,” *the William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (1989): 332.

³ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet - Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2008), 3.

⁴ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 294.

world.”⁵ Esteemed scholar of African American history and religious history, Albert Raboteau, called the African Methodist Episcopal Church “the most important black denomination and arguably the most important African-American institution for most of the nineteenth century.”⁶

Allen biographer Richard Newman noted that, “Like other African-American preachers, Allen was particularly enamored of Exodus, the story of ancient Jews’ divinely wrought liberation from Egyptian slavery.” Allen argued that “divine retribution of unrepentant American masters was Biblically ordained.”⁷ Some scholars have cast Allen as a type of Moses figure.⁸ In light of this esteemed legacy, Allen’s life, ministry and teaching have significant contemporary value in guiding the twenty-first century American Church out of its bondage to continued systemic ethnic segregation. To that end, this chapter will explore Richard’s Allen conversion to Christianity through the Methodist movement and his subsequent role as a leader in that movement. Dickerson says it succinctly when he writes, “Richard Allen, from birth to manhood was shaped by slavery and molded in Methodism.”⁹ Methodism’s antislavery theology, abolitionist activity and multiethnic community had an important impact upon Allen and his work. Allen had a fire and an intense calling for the liberation and equipping of his African American people, and is remembered for Black empowerment and as a charter leader in

⁵ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1.

⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 79.

⁷ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 116.

⁸ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2.

⁹ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 24.

autonomous Black institutions. Nonetheless, he saw in Methodism a medium through which to fashion a multiethnic witness and community. Allen remained committed to Black autonomy and self-governance, while never surrendering his dream of interracial harmony and community. To this end, Richard Allen nurtured and maintained cross-cultural friendships and allegiances and remained committed to Christ-centered kingdom building.

One of the challenges of exploring this topic is the brevity of written history of this great champion of the gospel. As Douglas Egerton writes, “Recovering the illustrious but elusive life of Richard Allen is no easy job.” He calls it “detective work.” Allen’s earliest years in slavery are subject to conjecture. Allen wrote and spoke scantily of it. Egerton writes, “Despite surviving to seventy-one years, Allen left behind very few letters, and his posthumously published autobiography, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, was written to glorify African American spirituality rather than provide details of one man’s life.”¹⁰ While the historical written material may be thin, the influence, prophetic insight and current relevance of the ministry of Bishop Richard Allen are immense.

Richard Allen was born into slavery on February 14, 1760. In his only published “memoirs,” published posthumously by his son, he begins with this statement: “I was born in the year of our Lord 1760, on February 14th, a slave to Benjamin Chew of Philadelphia.”¹¹ Exactly where he was born is under some debate. Scholars are divided

¹⁰ Douglas R. Egerton, “Judging the Founders: Richard Allen and the Soul of America,” *Reviews in American History* 37, no. 1 (2009): 22.

¹¹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen. To Which Annexed the Rise and Progress of this African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of*

on whether he was born in Philadelphia or in Delaware. Both of these seem plausible.

Benjamin Chew (1722-1810) was an esteemed lawyer and political figure in Philadelphia. He was also a vast property owner in the State of Delaware. Newman writes:

A gentleman of property and standing, he [Chew] was what people in colonial society referred to as ‘worthy.’ Wealthy enough to own several impressive properties in both Delaware and Pennsylvania... he bought and sold slaves his entire life. Like other worthies, he viewed slave labor as a critical part of estate building... In urban areas like Philadelphia, that meant utilizing slaves as porters, butlers, cooks, and laborers in fancy homes. In the Pennsylvania (and Delaware) countryside, this meant using slaves to clear the land, build houses and barns, and tend to crops. Richard Allen and his family were thus bound to a man who viewed bondage as vital to business, society and culture in a place already known as the City of Brotherly Love.¹²

Since the Allen family was sold to Chew’s farming neighbor in Delaware, Stokely Sturgis, some scholars wonder whether or not Allen was actually born at Chew’s Whitehall Plantation in Kent County, one of Delaware’s largest plantations that spanned one thousand acres. “Because his large number of slaves worked at both estates, the Allen family probably experienced bondage in both urban and rural settings.”¹³

There is the interesting fact that Richard Allen ultimately took the surname “Allen” after manumission from slavery. Under the Sturgis family documents, from whom Allen purchased his freedom, there were only records of “‘Richard,’ ‘Richard Negro,’ and ‘Negro man named Richard,’ indicating that Allen had no surname at the time he was freed.”¹⁴ “Herbert G. Gutman in *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*

America. Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793: With an Address to the People of Colour in the United States (Philadelphia, PA: Martin & Boden, 1833), 15.

¹² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 28-29.

¹³ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 25.

¹⁴ Gary B. Nash, “New Light on Richard Allen, 334.

recounted the practice among slaves to adopt surnames from early slave owners to establish intergenerational lineage in the event of sale and the splitting of black families.”¹⁵ Dickerson notes that this very well could have been a connection to “slave owner William Allen, whose daughter married the Philadelphia attorney Benjamin Chew... It seems that the Allen surname, rather than the last name, Chew, drew from these origins.”¹⁶ This would support Allen having been born in Philadelphia, a city to which he would return and which would be the center of his most significant ministry. The most noteworthy factor of his giving himself a surname was that it was an acknowledgment of freedom and an expression of empowerment. As Newman states, “Whatever the reason, Allen’s renaming constituted the first act of self-possession in his life.”¹⁷

Allen did not comment much on his slave years, at least not in surviving records. He did, however, go to great lengths to discuss his spiritual awakening and calling into ministry. Having been sold by Chew into the servitude of the Sturgis farm in Delaware, Allen came into contact with Methodist revivalists as Delaware was a “hot spot”¹⁸ for Methodist evangelism. In his autobiography, Allen recounts his conversion as a young man in 1777:

My sins were a heavy burden. I was tempted to believe there was no mercy for me. I cried to the Lord both night and day. One night I thought hell would be my portion. I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner, and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains fell off, and, glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled. I cried, enough for me—the Saviour died. Now my

¹⁵ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 25.

¹⁶ Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 25.

¹⁷ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 45.

¹⁸ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 39.

confidence was strengthened that the Lord, for Christ's sake, had heard my prayers and pardoned all my sins.¹⁹

Allen would return to this moment in his preaching and for affirmation again and again.

Newman writes, "The memory of his conversion experience stayed with him until the day he died. Indeed, Allen's autobiography trumpeted two birthdays: the one that put him on earth in 1760 and his rebirth... as a teenager."²⁰

Suddenly, Allen's life took on a whole new outlook and mission. Allen shared that he went from "house to house, exhorting my old companions, and telling all around what a dear Saviour I had found."²¹ He joined the Methodist Society and began to meet regularly in Methodist class meetings for several years with a leader named John Gray. He also found new resolve to intersect his spiritual life with the conduct and trajectory of his physical life. His new found "freedom" would soon transform the entire Sturgis plantation. Allen and his brother's attendance at regular Methodist class meetings as slaves excused them from work and that drew attention from others.

Fellow slave owners, for example, taunted (Sturgis) for permitting the Allens to attend biweekly Methodist services. 'Stokely's Negroes would soon ruin him,' they said, because the Allen brothers allegedly neglected their chores in order to go to class meetings. They resolved, therefore, to prove their naysayers wrong. 'We would work night and day,' Allen recalled, 'to get our crops forward.' Sometimes they refused to go to religious gatherings if they were behind in their work. They were determined to disprove the fiction that 'religion made us worse servants.' Even Sturgis noticed that the Allens were so serious about their labor that he admonished them to resume their regular attendance at Methodist services.²²

¹⁹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 15-16.

²⁰ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 40.

²¹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 16.

²² Denis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 27.

This resolve, fueled by his faith, would serve Allen well in attaining his freedom and supporting him in the future as an itinerant preacher, church planter and denomination builder. Allen's active involvement with the Methodist society, coupled with the expansion of Methodist evangelistic efforts in the area, ended up with a Methodist foray onto the Sturgis plantation. In 1779, Methodist meetings occurred nearby and on the Sturgis plantation. Francis Asbury, the most influential Methodist of the time, preached at Wells' farm, where Allen had been attending Methodist class, and at the Sturgis farm. Freeborn Garrettson, a charismatic Methodist preacher, preached at the Sturgis farm and confronted the slaveholder that he had been 'weighed in the balance and found wanting,' a reference to the Old Testament passage found in Daniel 5:27. After this encounter, according to Allen, Sturgis "could not be satisfied to hold slaves, believing it to be wrong, and shortly proposed to me and my brother buying our times, to pay him 60£ gold and silver, or \$2000, Continental money."²³ Some historians question whether this was a truly repentant and magnanimous gesture by Sturgis, or an outgrowth of him being in significant debt. Allen paid Sturgis in full by August, 1783, about three and a half years after the bargain had been struck. Six years after his powerful conversion experience, Richard Allen was a truly free man, both spiritually and legally.

Almost immediately, Allen's career as an itinerant Methodist preacher took off. Newman records that "Allen became a familiar figure at camp meetings and revivals... 'This man must be a man of God,' people replied upon hearing Allen's voice."²⁴ Soon he was courted by the Pennsylvania abolitionist movement who included him in pamphlets

²³ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 17.

²⁴ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 46.

celebrating achievement of “free black preachers, workers and community builders.” He “paid out of pocket to be a Methodist itinerant,” yet his preaching and ministry was so impressive “that white officials soon paid his expenses.”²⁵ Allen began preaching in Delaware and then into New Jersey. Allen recalled walking “until my feet were so sore and blistered... I could scarcely bear them to the ground.”²⁶ Over the next two years, in Pauline fashion, Allen preached the gospel traveling through southeastern Pennsylvania, Baltimore, Maryland and Delaware. In 1786, he returned to his native Philadelphia. Newman writes that “Allen had traveled several hundred miles and impressed thousands of worshipers, many of whom were white.”²⁷ Allen enjoyed preaching to persons of all hues, but he had a passion for his own African people to hear the gospel and longed for a place where he could build a black constituency. In 1786, that opportunity emerged when Allen accepted the invitation of a white Methodist elder to come to Philadelphia and minister to “black congregants in the burgeoning city he once called home.”²⁸

The church that Allen was invited to was St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen recalled:

Preaching was given out for me at five o’clock in the morning at St, George church. I strove to preach as well as I could... the Lord was with me. We had good times and several souls were awakened... I thought I would stop in Philadelphia a week or two. I preached at different places in the city. My labor was much blessed. I soon saw a large field open in seeking and instructing my African brethren, who had been a long forgotten people and few of them attended public worship... It was not uncommon for me to preach from four to five times a

²⁵ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 46.

²⁶ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 47.

²⁷ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 47.

²⁸ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 50.

day. I established prayer meetings; I raised a society in 1786 for forty-two members.²⁹

“During that brief period he had met more black Methodists than he had ever encountered previously in one place, and observed even more unchurched freedmen, who were all... ‘ripe for the harvest.’”³⁰ Newman notes that, “The itinerant bug briefly bit, but rising attendance compelled Allen to stay put... Allen remained in Philadelphia the rest of his life.”³¹

The “society” that Allen formed was the Free African Society (FAS). This was a nondenominational black mutual aid society. Newman writes, “Just as (Allen) came to see blacks as an underserved (and often despised) minority within Philadelphia’s religious landscape, so too did Allen view them as socially bereft. In a racially prejudiced society... where could free blacks turn for financial or educational support? ...The Free African Society was dedicated to community action ‘without regard to religious tenets.’”³² The society mobilized the free black community and built trust for Allen and others as leaders. Attendance of black worshippers began to swell.

As a result, racism raised its ugly head, even in “abolitionist” Philadelphia. As Newman puts it, “Slavery might have been on the decline in Pennsylvania, but whites’ negative racial attitudes remained entrenched.”³³ Allen recounts the events at St.

²⁹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 24.

³⁰ Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Sabbaths* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1973), 42.

³¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 54.

³² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 60.

³³ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 58.

George's Church: "When the colored people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall."³⁴ Historian Carol George notes, "As the free black population grew in size, it threatened to disrupt the... white consensus, and the only way that social leaders seemed able to deal with it was to separate it and restrict it."³⁵ This mindset became the poisonous root from which segregated churches emerged out of what had initially been a multiethnic community.

On a fateful Sunday in 1787 (or 1792-1793, depending on whose source you rely on,)³⁶ the situation came to a historic head. Here is the account in Allen's own words:

On Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery... We expected to take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better. We took those seats. Meeting had begun, and they were nearly done singing, and just as we got to the seats, the elder said, 'Let us pray.' We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling... I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees... having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off of his knees, and saying, 'You must get up—you must not kneel here.' Mr. Jones replied, 'Wait until prayer time is over.' [The trustee replied] 'No, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and force you away.' Mr. Jones said, 'Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more.' With that, he beckoned to one of the other trustees... to come to his assistance. He came... to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.³⁷

³⁴ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 25.

³⁵ Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 50.

³⁶ Allen and other AME leaders document November 1787 but "Milton C. Sernett in 1975... contended that the gallery to which Allen referred in his autobiography was not built until the 1790's. Hence, the St. George's incident probably occurred in 1792 or 1793, and not in 1787. Other historians, including Gary B. Nash, Albert J. Raboteau, and John Wigger, believe Sernett and doubt the written account of Allen... Richard S. Newman's biography written in 2008, leaves open the possibility that either Allen's account... or Sernett's research... may be correct" (See Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 30-31).

³⁷ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 25.

Whether or not this incident was spontaneous or premeditated in an act of organized defiance is also a historical debate. An article that appeared in the *Colored American* in 1837 entitled “The History of Churches and Ecclesiastical Organization among the People of Color” asserted that this was a planned “rebellion against racial exclusion.”³⁸ Newman goes on to say, “In this version of events... Allen and black congregants are fully aware of plans to segregate them... Knowing full well that whites might rebuke them, Allen led his people into the main pews. When told to go to ‘blacks-only’ seats in the balcony, Allen then triumphantly led his brethren out of the church.”³⁹ This event was a seminal moment in the pursuit of racial justice in America. Interestingly, Rosa Parks’ biographer, Douglas Brinkley, noted it as an influence in her life. He linked her act of civil disobedience to her devotional life at St. Paul A.M.E. Church in Montgomery, Alabama: “Parks’ defiance of sinful segregational practices on local city buses reflected devotional practices that developed out of her experiences in private and public worship and her understanding of herself as a twentieth-century heir to Richard Allen.”⁴⁰ The list goes on of those who saw this event and Richard Allen’s subsequent legacy as monumental in the pursuit of black liberation and racial justice in America. Newman cites several examples of renowned African Americans paying homage to Allen. “James Baldwin, writing on the centennial of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, called Allen one of the great ‘poets’ of black aspiration” and “W.E.B. DuBois celebrated Allen’s liberationist Christian ethics as a model for rising black

³⁸ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 66.

³⁹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 66-67.

⁴⁰ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 18.

reformers.”⁴¹ Biographer Richard Newman dubs Allen “the nation’s first black prophetic leader.”⁴² This infamous incident at St. George’s also forever stained the American church. “The gallery incident at St. George’s is undoubtedly the most famous event in African-American religious history. Because it is such a dramatic and clear-cut example of racial discrimination that has **constantly marred religious life in this country**” (emphasis added).⁴³ The die for the formation of the then-and-now segregated American Church was cast.

In the aftermath of the fateful occurrence at St. George’s Church, Allen founded what would become for black Philadelphians their largest and most important institution, Bethel Church. Bethel would be the launching pad for the African Methodist Episcopal Church denomination, and Richard Allen would become its inaugural bishop. Bethel was not Philadelphia’s first black congregation, however. In an intriguing development, the Anglicans approached the former black worshipers of St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church with an offer to form a black Episcopalian church. The motivations for this may not have been pure, as Methodism was in some ways an exodus from Anglicanism and some might see this as a backhanded way to “get even.” Nonetheless, some consented and St. Thomas’s African Episcopal Church was formed with Absalom Jones as its first pastor. Allen was there as they began to dig the foundation of this African American church. Recognizing all Allen had done, the elder Absalom Jones deferred to the younger Allen. “‘As I was the first proposer of the African church,’ Allen himself noted

⁴¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 294-295.

⁴² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 297.

⁴³ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 80.

with a rare but evident sense of pride, ‘I put the first spade in the ground to dig a cellar for [that church]. This was the first African church or meetinghouse that was erected in the United States of America.’”⁴⁴

If Allen felt so strongly and uniquely tied to this mission, one must ask what kept him from aligning himself with it. The answer was Allen’s undying affection, affiliation and belief in Methodism. In spite of flagrant racism and disrespect, “Allen never renounced his religious debt to Methodism, and it is possible that he might have considered remaining within the denomination if its leaders and members had indicated a willingness to deal with the problems of black injustice.”⁴⁵ “He specifically praised the Methodists because ‘they were the first people that brought glad tidings to the colored people.’”⁴⁶ American Methodism drew more Black worshippers than any other denomination in the aftermath of the Great Awakening.⁴⁷ Many Africans were drawn to Methodism due to the fact that their worship and class meetings were not held to uphold solely the learned. Raboteau writes, “Methodist simplicity was better suited to the evangelization of an unlettered people than the more ‘highflown’ instruction offered by Episcopalians and Presbyterians.”⁴⁸ Methodists (due to their founder John Wesley’s absolute abhorrence to slavery) were, with Quakers, the most outspoken abolitionists, and the Methodist worship and camp meetings were more expressive and familiar for

⁴⁴ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 70.

⁴⁵ Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 7.

⁴⁶ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 22.

⁴⁷ Carol V. R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 16.

⁴⁸ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 88.

Africans than the solemnity of Quakerism. Allen wrote, “I was confident that there was no religious sect or denomination [that] would suit the capacity of colored people as well as the Methodist; for the plain and simple gospel suits best for any people; for the unlearned can understand, and the learned are sure to understand.”⁴⁹ Newman has noted, “For Methodists, the Lord was not some distant and angry figure but a palpable and healing presence in people’s lives.”⁵⁰ Allen saw in this group a people who worked for heaven on earth. “In Allen’s day Methodists were not shy about their antislavery commitments. This ‘antislavery militancy’ ... flowed from John Wesley himself.”⁵¹ While still contaminated by white supremacy and racism, Methodists sometimes foreshadowed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s dream of the Beloved Community.

Dickerson writes:

Egalitarian tendencies were deeply anchored in Methodist evangelism... The revivals and camp meetings, which regularly attracted large crowds, provided equal access to all. Open-air venues in both urban and rural settings drew persons of all classes and colors. Even when services were held in churches and other places indoors, the lack of restrictions ensured the presence of diverse attendees on a nonsegregated basis.⁵²

Early Methodism fostered this kind of unity. Dickerson says that, “The language of human equality found in Methodist evangelism... clothed them [Methodist preachers] in clerical authority in front of their interracial audiences that they addressed.”⁵³ Methodism was also one of the first organizations in America to empower diverse

⁴⁹ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 29.

⁵⁰ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 39.

⁵¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 40.

⁵² Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 19.

⁵³ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 20.

leaders. Methodists routinely licensed blacks to preach and as noted above, Allen and Hoosier represented diverse leadership at its chartering conference in the United States. This ethos led to healthy interracial partnerships. Allen formed a lifetime friendship with American Methodism's founding bishop, Francis Asbury. Newman records their friendship:

'Come and help me save souls,' [Asbury] asked Allen... Though Allen refused to accompany Asbury on missionary journeys to the Deep South, this did not prevent [them] from forming a great interracial friendship – a relatively uncommon thing in late-eighteenth century America. In 1803, Allen celebrated their two decades of friendship by purchasing a horse for Asbury (for the not-unsubstantial sum of ninety dollars!) ... When Allen broke from white Methodists at St. George's... Asbury gave the inaugural address to the new black church. It was Asbury too who ordained Allen as the first black Methodist deacon in 1799.⁵⁴

Richard Allen thrived in this purest and most original form of American Methodism, and his influence on it was immeasurable. This is evident in the earliest rolls of the American Methodist Church. Methodist historian, Russell E. Richey records that "In 1786, the first year of count by race, the *Minutes* show 1890 Black members. By 1797, 12,215 Blacks belonged... approximately one-quarter of total membership."⁵⁵ The American Methodist Church at its earliest inception was a multiethnic church,⁵⁶ and one could argue the chief architect of that was Richard Allen.

Richard Allen is rightly revered as a hero of black liberation, black autonomy and advancement. Yet, as a preacher of the gospel and an originator and leader of a

⁵⁴ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 48.

⁵⁵ Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 60.

⁵⁶ See for example, Michael Emerson's explanation of the earliest sociological definition of a multiethnic church as a church with "no one racial group making up more than 80% or more" in *Beyond Diversity* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2021), 9.

multiethnic church movement, he never gave up on the dream and the work of interracial harmony and a multiethnic community and church. “Equally important—and somewhat contrary to Allen’s iconic status as a promoter of black autonomy—he articulated a mantra of interracial harmony.”⁵⁷ One scholar who agrees that Allen should be remembered as a giant of Black American History, goes on to say that “Allen should not be viewed, however, through an exclusively racial prism. He was a thoroughly Methodist man whose understanding of Wesleyan theology affirmed the humanity of all peoples and required that all should be physically and spiritually freed from the bondage of both slavery and sin.”⁵⁸ He knew that slavery and racism affected both black and white, tormenting blacks physically and corrupting whites spiritually. To white audiences he sought to ““excite your attention to consider how hateful slavery is in the sight of that God who hath destroyed kings and princes for their oppression of slaves.””⁵⁹ Repentance and turning away from this evil could bring salvation as he had personally witnessed with the conversion of his former slave owner, Stokely Sturgis.

His commitment to the multiethnic church community was forged in his earliest missionary endeavors. During his most extensive journey in circuit preaching, he spent nearly two months preaching to Native Americans. Newman describes his travels through circuits in:

Pennsylvania...Maryland and... Delaware. By the time he finished his itinerancy... Allen had traveled several hundred miles and impressed thousands of worshipers, many of whom were white...The majority of his contacts were white. This fact underscored [his] early belief that religion could form a bridge of

⁵⁷ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 128.

⁵⁸ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 23.

⁵⁹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 9.

understanding between the races... His revivalist experience was proof positive that black and white could pray together, eat together, and live together as equals.⁶⁰

“Allen hoped to build bridges between black and white citizens... This was God’s true way, he believed; black and white Methodists’ ability to reconcile racial differences.”⁶¹ Allen always felt that Methodism “transcended a segregated church.”⁶² He understood that the Wesleyan movement toward holiness had both personal and corporate dimensions. The experience of “chains falling off” (as he described in his conversion story above) meant that those who experienced the liberating power of God’s forgiveness, love and grace would spend their lives seeking liberation for others. He believed that Methodists were called to “reconstruct societal structures to conform to what God intended for creation.”⁶³

Unfortunately, Allen saw a deficiency in his white Methodist brothers and sisters that quickly led to a spiritual decline. “I feel thankful that ever I heard a Methodist preach...[but] It is to be awfully feared that the simplicity of the Gospel that was among them fifty years ago, and that they conform more to the world and the fashions thereof, they would fare very little better than the people of the world.”⁶⁴ Allen witnessed this first hand as elitism crept into the Methodist movement at its chartering “Christmas Conference,” an event that led to institutionalizing what had been a more organic

⁶⁰ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 47.

⁶¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 134.

⁶² Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 71.

⁶³ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 23.

⁶⁴ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 30.

movement. He wrote that, “Many of the ministers were set apart in holy orders at this conference, and said to be entitled to the gown; and I thought religion has been declining in the church ever since. There was a pamphlet published by some person, which stated, that when the Methodist were no people, then they were a people; and now [that] they have become a people they were no people; which had often serious weight upon my mind.”⁶⁵ Raboteau writes, “The Methodist discipline itself enjoined ‘extravagance in useless ornaments and unnecessary fashionable dress’: Allen traced the declension of Methodism to the introduction of the ministerial gown, an affectation from the Church of England.”⁶⁶ He saw this as a movement away from their original simplicity and accessibility. “Methodists in the United States, in distancing themselves from their non-elite origins in... colonial America were becoming... an established church, which eschewed identification with the poor and the slave.”⁶⁷ Elitism and white supremacy stalled the movement and even eroded its founder’s firm antislavery sentiment. This led to what one Methodist scholar calls the “fall of Methodism:”

Early Methodism had an Edenic quality to it. It was a troubled Eden, to be sure, but an Eden nonetheless. In what they later termed ‘the garden of Methodism,’ ... Methodist preachers planted a very radical word, one that called for brethren to live together in unity, as sinners freed by Christ and empowered by him to a new, ordered existence spelled out in rule and given form in Methodist structures. The radical character of that word took most dramatic expression in the acceptance accorded Blacks into the Methodist fold. Methodists offered an ambiguous, incomplete acceptance that very early had racist and segregationist aspects. Yet they did invite Blacks into membership, preached freedom, and demanded that members emancipate their slaves... However, they retreated rather quickly from

⁶⁵ Richard Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours*, 22.

⁶⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 102.

⁶⁷ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 23.

such antislavery ideas. That retreat represented an important feature of Methodist loss of innocence and a very important change in the Methodist economy.⁶⁸

Clear back in 1796, Francis Asbury “affirmed Allen’s observations when [Allen] declared that much of Methodist spirituality had become ‘superficial’ and that Wesleyan whites should emulate the piety of black Methodists.” Asbury also stated “that Methodism would have been better off if we had entered here to preach only to the Africans.”⁶⁹

Allen’s legacy would inspire future generations. As Frederick Douglass put it years ago, “Allen’s dream of interracial harmony still resonated.”⁷⁰ Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Newman writes, “as times changed, and a succession of new issues arose (the fate of black labor, international anticolonialism...), Allen remained relevant to new generations of activists.”⁷¹ At the end of his life, Allen still pined over the early years of the multiethnic Methodist movement. Possibly the solution to contemporary schisms and segregation in the Methodist Church lies in its past, in the passionate kingdom vision of great saints like the esteemed Bishop Richard Allen. The impact of diversity on Richard Allen’s spiritual development and his lifelong yearning to see racial reconciliation in the body of Christ serves as an invaluable illustration for the power of “lived diversity” in the Church. When lived diversity is present and highly valued, spiritual formation grows. When it is not, as tragically witnessed by the “fall of

⁶⁸ Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism*, xii.

⁶⁹ Dennis C. Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 22-23.

⁷⁰ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 294.

⁷¹ Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 294.

Methodism,” anti-Christian values such as racism, white supremacy and white nationalism can gain traction and grow.

The fact is, when the Church holds fast to God’s intention for it to model the kingdom across ethnic and cultural lines, kingdom growth happens both individually and collectively. This point is intensely underscored as it comes here in the form of an original founder of a historical faith community forced into segregation. If Bishop Richard Allen did not lose his vision and passion for the Revelation 7:9 church to “come on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10) in the midst of flagrant oppression, overt racism and legalized American slavery, then our abandonment of it in the contemporary Church is inexcusable.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The doctrine of the Trinity is foundational to Christian theology and as Catherine LaCugna writes, has “radical consequences for Christian life.”¹ As African theologian James Henry Owino Kombo puts it, “The doctrine of the Trinity is the foundational doctrine for Christian theology, doxology and practice... the Trinity is the innermost heart of the Christian faith.”² Owen Thomas and Ellen Wondra note, “The doctrine of God depends entirely on what God is revealed to be, on the divine self-disclosure attested to in the Bible and interpreted in church tradition. In the doctrine of God, the most fundamental thing to say is that God is self-revealed as triune, as threefold, named in the New Testament as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”³ That God chose this particular self-disclosure is intentional and essential in examining salvation history, as well as individual and communal Christian faith. Thomas and Wondra go on to note, “First, it is clear that... God... is one, a unity, not a plurality. But second, it is also clear that... God... is

¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Press, 1991), 1.

² James Henry Owino Kombo, *Theological Models of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Langham Publishing, 2016), 6.

³ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology, Third Edition* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 67 (emphasis added).

not a simple unity, but a complex, organic, or differentiated unity.”⁴ To see God revealed in a community of differentiated “persons” yet existing in absolute unity has great implications for Christ’s Church and its mission in the world. If God exists in differentiated unity and the role of Christ’s Church is to reveal who God is and God’s mission and intention for the world, would not that same God seek to reveal Godself through a differentiated and unified Church?

Richard Rohr writes that, “Followers of Jesus have long wrestled with this question in the context of God as a unity in diversity.”⁵ In Creation, God says:

Let *us* make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness; and let *them* have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created *them*; *male and female* he created *them* (Gen. 1:26-27, emphasis added).

The “us” who created in a first-person plural community is a foundational disclosure of the triune God in scripture. God’s existence and revelation as the triune God reveals much about God’s purpose for creating. It also reveals God’s intention for the Creation and for humankind, as part of that Creation, who bears witness to the very image of the Creator.

In the history of Trinitarian theology there have been some significant challenges. Kombo writes, “In their different ways, the critics of the doctrine of the Trinity dismiss it as ‘the most enigmatic doctrine.’”⁶ Jurgen Moltmann writes that, “Ever since Kant, some

⁴ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 68.

⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance* (London, United Kingdom: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), 2016), 42.

⁶ James Henry Owino Kombo, *Theological Models*, 2.

have contended that ‘nothing whatsoever can be gained for practical purposes’ from the doctrine of the Trinity.”⁷ For the most part, once the doctrine of the Trinity was established and embedded into church tradition, it was as though its work and contribution to theology was finished. As Kant and others reflected upon it, they concluded that it had no “practical” application in Christian life. Stephen Seamands contends that this legacy continues to exist in the practical theology of the Church:

Unfortunately, most of us pastors and Christian leaders haven’t advanced much beyond this either... In our ministerial practice, we baptize persons in the Trinitarian name of God. During worship, we sing the doxology praising Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or hymns like ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ extolling ‘God in three persons, blessed Trinity!’ ... But aside from such occasional references, our thoughts about the Trinity are few and far between. In the daily grind of ministry, no Christian doctrine seems more far removed and less practically relevant.⁸

The fact that the “Trinity” is not specifically named in scripture has led some in the theological community to discard it or at least ignore it as unbiblical. This antagonistic position is difficult to support. Although the word “trinity” is never stated verbatim in scripture, the basis for its understanding is grounded in the testimony of scripture (see e.g. Gen. 1:26-27 above). As Karl Barth contends, “The Bible is the testimony of God’s Word. God’s Word is God himself in his revelation. God is in unobliterated unity the revealer, the revelation and the being-revealed.”⁹ Scott Swain states the same concept this way: “We cannot fully appreciate how ‘the Trinity is in the Bible’ without observing how ‘the Bible is in the Trinity...’ the Trinity is the ontological

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 62.

⁸ Stephen Seamands, *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2005), 10-11.

⁹ As quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 63.

principle of the Bible. The Trinity is not simply one of the things about which the Bible speaks. The Trinity is the speaker from whom the Bible and all things proceed.”¹⁰ Thus for Barth and others, this is the “biblical root of the doctrine of the Trinity.”¹¹

Tertullian (150-240 CE) has been called “the founder of Western Christian theology” and was the first one to use the word “Trinity,” which comes from the Latin *trinitas* meaning “triad” or “three-fold.”¹² The thrust of his teaching was around substance or *substantia*. The Trinity was God as one substance, in three persons (*una substantia – tres personae*). Moltmann writes:

The One God is in reality not a numerical or monadic One, but a unity which is differentiated in itself... In order to make this differentiated unity clear, Tertullian draws on gnostic and Neoplatonic images such as sun—ray—reflection; or source—brook—river. The images are used to describe distinguishable individualities of the same matter... For Tertullian, God is from all eternity One, but not alone.¹³

This became fundamental in defending Christ, the Son’s, divinity. The Council of Nicaea in 325 CE addressed the problem created in the Eastern Church by Arianism, a heresy first proposed by Arius of Alexandria that stated that Christ was not divine but a created being. The Council turned to the *una substantia* and used the word, *homoiousia* (“of one substance”) and adopted it into their creed. Moltmann states that, “The one, indivisible, divine substance is constituted as three individual, divine persons.”¹⁴ Much of early Christian theological thought on the Trinity, beginning with Tertullian, came out of a

¹⁰ Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity & the Bible*, 10.

¹¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 63.

¹² Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 48.

¹³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 137.

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 16.

reflection on the Immanent Trinity which focuses on how the triune God exists in and of Godself. It addresses the question of how God exists in substance and persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in eternal communion.

As Arianism questioned the divinity of Christ, other questions emerged as to the triune God's inner nature and existence. Leonardo Boff succinctly describes three of these "erroneous ways of understanding the Blessed Trinity... in the church of the past and lasting up to our own time." The first is *modalism*, which depicts one and the same God appearing to human beings in three modes. Boff explains this perspective as believing that God presents Godself in "three different masks." "It is only for us that God is Trinity; in himself he is simply the sole solitary God. This... understanding means giving up the characteristically Christian idea of God as communion of the three Unique Ones."¹⁵ The danger in this, per Moltmann, is that "the unity of the absolute subject is stressed to such a degree that the Trinitarian Persons disintegrate into mere aspects of the one subject."¹⁶ The second misunderstanding of the Trinity, according to Boff, is *subordinationism*, which views the Son and the Holy Spirit as subordinate to the Father. "Only the Father is fully God." The Son and the Holy Spirit are "never equal and with the same nature as the Father... [which] leads to the loss of the equality among the three divine Persons."¹⁷ The final misinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, per Boff, is *tritheism*. Boff says that this belief sees the Trinity as "three gods, distinct and

¹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 34.

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 18.

¹⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, see full discussion 34–35.

separate from one another.”¹⁸ This view was most widely rejected by early and present Christian theology as it denies the Judeo-Christian understanding of monotheism.

Scott Swain has noted that there has been a broad resurgence of “Trinitarian biblical exegesis” and reflection over the past few decades:

From the standpoint of academic theology, the rise of renewed interest in Trinitarian biblical exegesis is nearly miraculous. Once regarded as the latter Hellenistic corruption of primitive evangelical religion, far removed from the minds of Jesus, the apostolic church, and its Scriptures, the Trinity has been restored to its rightful place as an object of interpretive attention.¹⁹

More modern Christian theological reflection has emphasized a different perspective which emphasizes the Economic Trinity, or the Trinity as self-revealed in human history and acting in the economy of salvation. Richard Rohr describes such knowledge as “*participatory*.”²⁰ One could argue that the most pivotal writing in this vein came from Catherine LaCugna in her work, *God With Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. She writes,

This economy of redemption was so decisive in early Christian reflection that it radically altered the way God was to be thought of... According to the doctrine of the Trinity elaborated by the end of the fourth century, God exists from all eternity in differentiated personhood, as Father, Son and Spirit. These three persons are equally divine because of their role in our salvation and equally God because they share in the same divine essence or nature (*ousia*). At the heart of the Christian doctrine of God were two affirmations: God has given Godself to us in Jesus Christ and the Spirit, and this self-revelation or self-communication is nothing less than what God is as God.²¹

¹⁸ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, see full discussion 35.

¹⁹ Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity & the Bible: On Theological Interpretation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 12.

²⁰ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 49.

²¹ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1991), 209.

If, in fact, a more holistic approach to Trinitarian theology includes an understanding of the Immanent and Economic Trinity, then the Church should strongly return to this reflection as extremely relevant, especially if the Church is to be seen as part of God's economy of salvation for the world.

The early Christian approach took a course almost exactly opposite to modalism. Modalism started with the one monotheistic God and sought to explain the Trinity. The Early Church's approach, by contrast, begins with the Trinity and seeks understanding in what this reveals about God's very immanent nature. This was the methodology of the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory Nazianzen). Rohr summarizes their approach by stating, "In effect, they said, *Don't start with the One and try to make it into Three, but start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One.*"²² This is not a search for the One behind the many, but rather the many as a direct revelation of the very nature of the One God. "It is the same triune God as he is in his saving revelation and as he is in himself."²³ This is both God for us and God in Godself. Boff says that "whenever we speak of the Blessed Trinity we must think of the communion of the divine three.... The Blessed Trinity is thus a mystery of inclusion. Such inclusion prevents us from understanding one Person without the others."²⁴ This "mystery" has best been described by some theologians as a "divine dance." For example, Rohr writes, "Whatever is going on in God, is a *flow*, a *radical*

²² Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 43.

²³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 151

²⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 14-15.

relatedness, a perfect communion between three—a circle dance of love.”²⁵ Trappist monk, Elias Marechal, traces this image back to the Cappadocian Fathers of the East and imagines the following:

The ancient Greek Fathers depict the Trinity as a Round Dance: an event that has continued for six thousand years, and six times six thousand, and beyond the time when humans *first* knew time. An infinite current of love streams without ceasing, *to and fro, to and fro, to and fro*: gliding from the Father to the Son, and back to the Father, in one timeless happening. This circular current of Trinitarian love continues night and day.²⁶

The transcendence, power and mystery of this image of the Trinity escapes scientific description and demands this kind of poetic language. As Rohr notes, “This starting point, along with the contemplative mind to understand it, was much more emphasized and developed in the Eastern Church, which is frankly why it still sounds foreign to most of the Western churches.”²⁷

The only way that the Eastern Christian theologians could come close to describing this image of the triune God was to employ the Greek term *perichoresis*. The noun first appears in the writings of Maximus Confessor (d. 662) but the related verb *perichoreo* is found earlier in Gregory of Nazianzus (d. 389/90).²⁸ It began to spread with St. John Damascene’s (d.750) use of it in the seventh century.²⁹ Applied to the Trinity, this Greek expression means that a Person contains the other two (in a static

²⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 27.

²⁶ Elias Marechal, *Tears of an Innocent God: Conversations on Silence, Kindness and Prayer* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 7.

²⁷ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 43.

²⁸ G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 291.

²⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 14.

sense) or that each Person interpenetrates the others mutually (in an active sense). Boff describes it as follows:

Perichoresis means one Person's action of involvement with the other two. Each divine person permeates the other and allows itself to be permeated by that person. This interpenetration expresses the love and life that constitutes the divine nature. It is the very nature of love to be self-communicating; life naturally expands and seeks to multiply itself. Thus, the divine Three from all eternity find themselves in an infinite explosion of love and life from one place to the other... In simple words it means that the Father is ever in the Son, communicating life and love to him. The Son is ever in the Father knowing him and ever acknowledging him as Father. Father and Son are in the Holy Spirit as mutual expression of life and love. The Holy Spirit is in the Son and the Father as source and manifestation of life and love of this boundless source. All are in all. In 1441, the Council of Florence eloquently stated that, "None precedes the other in eternity, none exceeds the other in greatness or excels the other in power."³⁰

In this perichoretic, differentiated unity, the Persons are not absorbed into one another; nor do they exert power, position or privilege over one another so as to dissolve the individuality of the Person(s). Rather, they exist and dance and communicate and commune in perfect unity, fellowship and love. St. John Damascene, explains it this way:

The persons are made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other... without coalescence or commingling. Not do the Son and Spirit stand apart, nor are they sundered in essence... For, to put it concisely, the Godhead is undivided; and it is just like three suns cleaving to each other without separation, and giving out light mingled and conjoined into one.³¹

In addition, this perichoretic understanding of the Trinity exemplifies the lived diversity that should be an intricate part of believers' individual and corporate faith experiences, just as it is an intricate part of God. To use the language of these

³⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 14-15.

³¹ James Henry Owino Kombo, *Theological Models for the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 89-90.

theologians, Christian believers should be interpenetrating and permeating one another's lives through self-communicating love. This should be the essence of the Church just as it is the very essence of God. The Church should not be a homogeneous community held together by similar cultural traditions or like-minded beliefs. It should be representative of its Creator held together across ethnic, cultural, gender and other earthly lines of division in perichoretic union. To use Boff's language, the Church should be a "mutual expression of life and love... communicating one to others... [in an] explosion of love and life from one place to the other."³² With this theological bent in mind, reimagine Paul's foundational words in Ephesians 3, this way:

"For this reason," [writes the church planter, Paul], "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom **every family** in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his [perichoretic] glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in **your inner being with power** through his [perichoretic] Spirit, and that [the perichoretic] Christ may **dwell in your hearts** through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with **all the saints**, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **so that you may be filled with all the fullness of** [the perichoretic] **God**" (Eph. 3:14-19, emphasis added).

Even more stunning than the Church Fathers' theological understanding of the perichoretic communion of the triune God was their *experience* of it. When St. Gregory Nazianzen spoke in his Oration on Baptism, he said:

No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illuminated by the splendor of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any one of the Three, I think of Him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I

³² Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 14-15.

contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out undivided light.³³

This is the practical application of the doctrine of the Trinity that Kant and others missed. Boff poignantly states, “The communion of the Blessed Trinity is not closed in on itself; it opens outward.”³⁴ It is what Moltmann calls a “relationship of fellowship” that is “open to the world.”³⁵ Boff writes, “Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always together: they create together, save together, and together bring us into their communion of life and love.”³⁶ In that God exists in perfect community, God’s natural impulse and yearning is to reach outward in the formation of a perfected community. LaCugna states, “The very nature of God therefore, is to seek out the deepest possible communion and friendship with every last creature on this earth.”³⁷

C. Baxter Krueger, Ph.D., a Trinitarian scholar and the Director of Perichoresis Ministries (a ministry dedicated to the recovery of the gospel of the triune God), has written a commentary on William Paul Young’s bestselling book and subsequent movie, *The Shack*. Some view this work as the most impactful presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity in recent times. Krueger’s work is entitled *The Shack Revisited*. In it, he writes,

The stunning truth is that the triune God, in amazing and lavish love, determined to open the circle and share the Trinitarian life with others. This is the one, eternal and abiding reason for the creation of the world and of human life. There is no other God, no other will of God, no second plan, no hidden agenda for human beings. Before the creation of the world, the Father, Son and Spirit set their love upon us and planned to bring us to share and know and experience the

³³ James Henry Owino Kombo, *Theological Models for the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 87.

³⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 4.

³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 64.

³⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 9.

³⁷ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity & Christian Life*, 194.

Trinitarian life itself. Unto this end the cosmos was called into being, and the human race was fashioned.³⁸

Moltmann sees this opening of the Trinitarian circle to share God's "amazing and lavish love" with all creation as best witnessed in the "passion of God that makes him suffer with his creation and his people." He cites Karl Barth, who said it this way:

He [God] could have remained satisfied with Himself and with the impassible glory and blessedness of His own inner life. But he did not do so. He elected man [humans] as a covenant-partner... This God has no need of us. This God is self-sufficient. This God knows perfect beatitude in Himself. He is not under any need of constraint. It [the passion of Christ] takes place in an inconceivably free overflowing of His goodness.³⁹

What overflows out of the triune God into creation is the very essence of God's nature—the "divine dance." As the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been loving and glorifying one another since all eternity, creation now reflects that "the heavens are telling the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). As Moltmann states, "Even if God can create what he wants, he only actually creates what is in accord with himself."⁴⁰ All creation includes humankind who only fell from this perfect union individually from the triune God in the Garden of Eden and collectively from one another at the Tower of Babel.

It is in light of the doctrine of the Trinity that one can fully understand the biblical declaration that "God is love" (1 John 4:16, emphasis added). The perfect love of the divine Persons of the Trinity holds them together in seamless unity from the beginning of time. If God is love, this love exists inwardly and naturally flows outward. This love is

³⁸ C. Baxter Kruger, *The Shack Revisited* (New York, NY: FaithWords, 2012), 62.

³⁹ As quoted in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 52–53.

⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 105–106.

now the “overflowing of [God’s] goodness” (see Barth above), which is the engine of creation. Moltmann proclaims:

Love is the self-communication of the good. It is the power of the good to go out of itself, to enter into other being, to participate into other being, and to give itself for other being... Love wants to live and to give life. It wants to open up the freedom to live. That is why love is the self-communication of the good without self-renunciation, and the self-giving of the good without self-dissolution... God loves the world with the very same love which he himself is in eternity.⁴¹

Richard Rohr uses the image of “mirroring” in creation. Thus, creation is intended to reflect the image and the essence of the triune God. Rohr states, “The inner life of the Trinity has become the outer life of all creation.”⁴² Karen Baker-Fletcher further illustrates this truth when she writes, “It is a relationship of divine love to creation and love in creation returning to God. God and creation are mutually responsive.”⁴³ Perhaps it is better said that God and Creation were *intended* to be mutually responsive, and therein lies the problem in creation. God intends for humanity and all of creation to live in and reflect the loving unity and harmony of the divine Persons. Jesus has been called “the revealer of the Trinity;”⁴⁴ Rohr writes, “the way of Jesus... is an invitation to a Trinitarian way of living, loving and relating on earth as it is in [the] Godhead.”⁴⁵ Boff says, “If God means three divine Persons in eternal communion among themselves, then

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 57.

⁴² Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 51.

⁴³ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*. (Nashville, TN: Chalice Press, 2006), 67.

⁴⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 65.

⁴⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 46.

we must conclude that we also, sons and daughters, are called to communion. We are image and likeness of the Trinity.”⁴⁶ Rohr states:

If a loving Creator started this whole thing, then there has to be a ‘DNA Connection’ as it were, between the One who creates and what is created... In other words, it is an entirely relational universe. If, at any time, we try to stop this flow moving *through* us, *with* us, and *in* us, we fall into the true state of sin— and it is truly a state more than a momentary behavior.⁴⁷

The great irony of the original lie to humanity in the Garden that “you will be like God” (Gen. 3:4b), is that humanity became the exact opposite of the triune God. They fell into disunion with their divine Creator and with one another (Gen. 3:7, 10). Suddenly, they reflected the antithesis of the image of the Three-in-One in which they were created. Michael Reeves states, “Astonishingly, it was this very rejection of God that then drew forth the extreme depths of his love. In his response to sin we see deeper than ever into the very being of God... Through the sending of the Son for our salvation we see more clearly than ever how generous and self-giving the love of the triune God is.”⁴⁸ This is the ministry of the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity: restoring us to right relationship with God as the triune God continues to open Godself unto us in perfect love and unity that “we might live *through* him (1 John 4:8, *NIV*, emphasis added).” This common narrative in salvation history can be more fully understood from the perspective of the doctrine of the Trinity.

⁴⁶ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 2.

⁴⁷ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 55–56.

⁴⁸ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 68–69.

Salvation history, however, does not end at the cross of Christ. When humanity “stopped this flow” of love, unity and harmony inherent in creation through the outflow of the triune God,⁴⁹ they not only fractured their unity and relationship with God, but also with one another. This is illustrated in what could be called the “Second Fall of Humanity.” In Genesis 11, we read: “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech” (Gen. 11:1, *NIV*). This is evidence of the unity in humanity created out of the unity of the community of divine Persons in the triune God. But Genesis communicates that trouble emerged “as people moved *eastward*” (Gen. 11:2, *NIV*). East was a clear symbol in Genesis implying movement away from God. When Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden, it is to the East (Gen. 3:24); and after committing the world’s first murder, Cain is also expelled to the East. “Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land... *east* of Eden (Gen. 4:16, *NIV* emphasis added).

The “first fall” of humanity is depicted individually in Adam and Eve, the “second fall” happens corporately. After moving eastward, “*They* said to *each other*, “Come, let *us* make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” *They* used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then *they* said, “Come, let *us* build *ourselves* a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that *we may make a name for ourselves...*” (Gen. 11:3–4, *NIV*, emphasis added). The “first fall” is a “He and / or She fall;” the “second fall” is a “They fall.”

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building... Come, let *us* (language again of the triune God) go down and confuse *their* language so *they* will not understand each other.” So the Lord scattered *them* from there over all the earth... That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the *whole world*. From there

⁴⁹ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 56.

the Lord scattered *them* over the face of the whole earth (Gen. 11:5-9, *NIV*, emphasis added).

This corporate unraveling from one another is yet another rejection of the nature and perfect communion of the triune God. It has devastating consequences to the social and communal nature of salvation. As Moltmann writes:

A social doctrine of the Trinity... leads us to think in terms of relationships and communities... Thinking in relationships and communities is developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity, and is brought to bear on the relation of men and women to God, to other people *and to [humanity] as a whole*, as well as on their fellowship with the whole creation (emphasis added).⁵⁰

Genesis 11 is the story of the fall of “humanity as a whole.”

Following the crucifixion and resurrection the next chapter in salvation history begins through the work of the Church. Many New Testament scholars see one of the central themes in Luke-Acts as the continuation of salvation history (as referenced in Chapter 2).⁵¹ This is the salvific work of the triune God. The triune God appears in the resurrected Jesus and commissions those whom he calls to “build his Church” (Matt. 16:18). This Church would reflect God’s communal image and restore the brokenness of human community to its unified creative state. The triune God speaks in the language of all three divine persons, at this moment. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21–22). Jesus ascends and the Spirit descends. “*Where* is Jesus raised *to*?” asks Moltmann:

⁵⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 19.

⁵¹ See for example, Richard I. Pervo, *Hermeneia: Acts: A Commentary*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 20–22.

Jesus is raised into the coming kingdom of God. Jesus is risen into the innermost being of God himself. He has been exalted into the divine origin of the Holy Spirit. That is the Trinitarian centre. That is why God's glory is manifested through him in this world. That is why in this present history he is the Lord of the divine kingdom. That is why in this present time he is the 'life-giving spirit' (1 Cor. 15.45), sending the Spirit upon the disciples, and the energies of the Spirit upon the church, and through the church 'on all flesh.'⁵²

The Spirit falls upon the church at Pentecost to empower and embolden their mission.

The curse of the "second fall" at Babel begins to be reversed as a world of "confused language" (Gen. 11:9) begins to speak "each... in their own native language" and yet all "hear" (Acts 2:6–8). The agent for this is the triune God in the third Person of the Trinity. Luke describes this event with a term he will use again and again in the Book of Acts, "filled with the Holy Spirit." "All of them were *filled with the Holy Spirit* and began to speak in other languages, as *the Spirit gave them ability*" (Acts 2:4, emphasis added). Moltmann reviews this Biblical story of Pentecost saying, "Christ sends the Spirit; he is himself present in the life-giving Spirit; and through the Spirit's energies – the charismata – he acts on men and women."⁵³ For Boff, "The Holy Spirit has been sent in mission to sanctify us and bring everything back to the reign of the Trinity."⁵⁴ Frank Viola states that this is the very mission of Christ's Church:

The church is an organic extension of the triune God. It was conceived in Christ before time (Eph. 1:4–5) and born on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1ff)... When a group of Christians follows their spiritual DNA, they will gather in a way that matches the DNA of the triune God – for they possess what God Himself

⁵² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 88–89.

⁵³ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 89.

⁵⁴ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 33.

possesses (...‘partakers of the divine image’ 2 Peter 1:4, *NASB*)... The headwaters of the Church are found in the Godhead.⁵⁵

The core value of lived diversity is presented in this Godhead of differentiated unity. It exists in Godself, and is reflected in the creation that God makes in God’s very image and nature, as well as the Church that God empowers as God’s agent for the renewal and restoration of the world. Richard Rohr writes:

God endlessly creates and allows diversity. All you need to do is look at the animal world, the world under the sea, hidden little insects, or all human beings at a grocery store... God clearly loves diversity. In all creation, is there any evidence to show that God is into uniformity? We like it because it gives the ego a sense of control—a false one. And so we constantly substitute uniformity for unity, obedience for love, and conformity for true loyalty to our deepest identity... The mystery that we’re talking about here [in the Trinity] is clearly diversity on display! The Three are diverse, different and distinct - and yet they are one... Diversity [is] intrinsic to Trinity’s DNA... We embrace this differentiation... God’s goal... is the same in creation. It is the making of persons, not the making of a uniform mob, which means there is clear diversity... Here we find patterns that allows us to create authentic community and authentic unity.⁵⁶

The triune God’s Church must reflect that diversity. Boff states that, “If... we take as our starting point that the Blessed Trinity is the perfect community, and that the communion of the divine Three makes them one God, then we will see another kind of church emerge. ... There arises a community with diversities that are respected and valued as expression of the wealth of the community of the Trinity itself.”⁵⁷

The Spirit, therefore, is so intentional in creating a diverse, multiethnic, multi-economic, multi-gender, intergenerational church in Acts that reflects the ultimate

⁵⁵ Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 35.

⁵⁶ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 61, 63.

⁵⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, 66.

trajectory of the church in Revelation 7:9— of “every nation, tribe, people and language.” The Spirit serves as a “homing device”⁵⁸ put in each of us in building this church. Anna Julia-Cooper calls the Spirit “this singing something”⁵⁹ in all of us, singing the hymns of the Revelation 7:9 Church. Rohr writes that the “Spirit has two jobs.” First, the Spirit “creates diversity,” and second, “connects all diverse things... in harmony.” The Spirit is the “Great Connector.”⁶⁰ Through the Spirit, this great connecting, differentiated God melts and dissolves human-made boundaries in an effort to build a unified diverse church to redeem the world. So, “filled with the Spirit” the apostles begin to build this God-breathed church. The Holy Spirit moves these Jewish men and women across cultures, genders and other human divisions. The Spirit sends “Philip... down to a city in Samaria,” a people whom he had only known as historic ethnic enemies, to plant a church there (Acts 8:5, *NIV*). The Spirit sends Peter and John across those same boundaries and they “placed their hands on them (the Samaritans),” something so abhorrent to them that it was utterly forbidden by their old Law. Further evidence that the author of the building of this new community is the triune God is that when they lay hands on the Samaritans, they too, “received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17, *NIV*). The Spirit then directs Phillip to a strategic position so that when an ethnically different, sexually altered man comes along, a man that Phillip would normally have nothing to do with as a Jewish man, the Spirit says, “Go over to that chariot and join [with him]” (Acts 8:29). In the Spirit-led

⁵⁸ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 151.

⁵⁹ Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 67.

⁶⁰ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 188.

encounter that ensues, the two men go into the waters of baptism together, the symbol of entry into the new church and the kingdom of God (Acts 8:28, 38-39).

Following these encounters of diverse persons, Peter is led by the Spirit into the home of an ethnic outsider, a Gentile named Cornelius, and “the Holy Spirit fell upon all of them” (Acts 10:44). Swain says, “The Father and the Son send the Spirit... in order that, through the Son, Jew and Gentile might have access in one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18; 1:23; 5:18).”⁶¹ On and on and on it goes through the pages of the New Testament. Moltmann gets at this so vividly when he writes:

The glorification of the Son and the Father proceeds actively from the Spirit... the union of God also proceeds from him... It also means the union of men and women with God and their union in God (John 17:21)... The divine Trinity throws itself open in the sending of the Spirit... It is a movement into which the whole creation is gathered. All things are assembled under the head, Christ, and all tongues confess him Lord... *All people... then partake of the inner Trinitarian life of God...* They become the joy of the Father’s blissful love. Then the triune God is at home in his world and his world exists out of his inexhaustible glory. This is the eternal feast of heaven and earth. This is the dance of the redeemed. This is the laughter of the universe (emphasis added).⁶²

The problem, according to Richard Rohr, is that “most of us don’t know how to be diverse and yet one... In unhealthy religion we’ve felt this pathological need to make everybody the same; church has become more of an exclusionary institution instead of this great banquet feast where Jesus constantly invites in [the others]... We don’t want ‘those people here with us... Please don’t bring them here.’”⁶³ Yet, the triune God

⁶¹ Scott R. Swain, *The Trinity & the Bible*, 54.

⁶² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 126-128.

⁶³ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 108.

through the Spirit, the “Great Connector,” continues to build Christ’s Church to reflect the differentiated unity inherent in the triune God.

The communal aspect of God’s differentiated existence and God’s intention for a unified differentiated Church is clear. Jesus echoes this sentiment in his High Priestly Prayer in John 17.

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that *they may all be one*. As you, Father, *are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us*, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, *so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one*, so that the world may know that you have sent me and *have loved them even as you have loved me* (John 17:20–23, emphasis added).

“Created” intention in the first person of the Trinity and “prayed-for” intention in the second person of the Trinity are on display in these passages yearning for a “completely one” differentiated community living in unity. This desired differentiated unity in “humankind” is self-revealed by God in the doctrine of the Trinity. Thomas and Wondra state that, “This triadic confession indicates the structure of the Christian life in relation to God. It is an account of the pattern of the new life that the Christian has entered through faith and baptism, a new life with particular form in relation to God.”⁶⁴ This new pattern creates oneness in the midst of diversity without dissolving diversity. The human family is designed and created in the differentiated unity of the triune God. Rohr makes this case the following way:

Whether we know it or not... This is not an invitation that [we] can agree or disagree with. It is a description of what is already happening in God and in everything created in God’s image and likeness... Yes, *God* is saving the world,

⁶⁴ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 69.

and God goes on working even though we fail to notice, fail to enjoy, fail to pass on, and fail to fully live our one and only life.⁶⁵

The reality is this: God's diverse Church is the beachhead of God's salvific activity in the world. The Church, what Paul called a "colony of heaven" (Phil. 3:20), is to reflect the community of the triune God and the community of the coming kingdom. To deny this call and live out lives of faith in segregated silos is to contradict the very essence and mission of the triune God.

⁶⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 38-39.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

If true, as proposed in the previous chapter, that differentiated unity is God’s intentional design for creation and humankind, then evidence of this truth should be evidenced in all creation, including other fields of study outside of the community of faith. The interdisciplinary field of study chosen to intersect and inform this specific undertaking is that of education. The interdisciplinary theory is that “lived diversity”—as experienced in educational structure and environment, curriculum, diverse student body, teachers and other educational leaders—enhances the quality of educational development. This is important evidence to support this project’s contention that “lived diversity” increases and heightens our level of spiritual development. If it enhances educational development, then that is a strong indicator that will be the case in Christian education, discipleship and spiritual formation.

In general, there have been extensive studies done in the field of education on the positive effects of diversity. Educational scholar Jenny Banh states that, “The data showing the positives on student learning has been robust in past studies... which showed that students have more cultural awareness, a higher tendency to vote, and increased overall satisfaction in college.”¹ One of the greatest teachers in all of Western history,

¹ Jenny Banh, “Diversity Literature Review in Higher Education: The Next Research Agenda,” *Multiculturalism in Higher Education Journal* (2010), 3.

Socrates, once stated, “I am a citizen, not of Athens or Greece, but of the world.” This vision is even more relevant today with the widening of globalization and global markets. Experiencing diversity throughout students’ educational journey better prepares them for success in navigating this world. Diversity scholar Richard Bucher notes three crucial outcomes of experiencing and learning about diversity. First, it helps to “develop greater insight into our interconnectedness.” Second, it “expands our awareness of different perspectives.” Finally, it “enhances our self-awareness.” Buchner writes, “Without a global perspective we are more likely to assume that our way of doing things is universal. This is particularly true of those aspects of our culture that are not readily visible to us.”²

The simple presence of diversity is not enough, however. In *Diversity Challenged*, a comprehensive study on the effects of Affirmative Action, Sylvia Hurtado writes the following:

Placing students of diverse backgrounds in a classroom is a necessary but insufficient condition of learning. Merely encountering differences can promote feelings of superiority and inferiority among students rather than growth and development. Particular pedagogical techniques [and diversity programs] promote the type of interaction necessary to create equal status conditions and, thus learning in diverse environment.³

It requires intentionality for diversity to be celebrated and valued instead of ending up on what Buchner calls “cultural cruise control,” which can lead to “misunderstandings, conflict and lost opportunities.”⁴ With an intentional approach and proper care, diversity can have many positive effects upon the education of students. Some scholars have noted

² Richard D. Buchner, *Diversity Consciousness: Opening Our Minds to People, Cultures and Opportunities. Fourth Edition*. (New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc., 2015), 10–11.

³ Jenny Banh, “Diversity Literature Review in Higher Education,” 1.

⁴ Richard D. Buchner, *Diversity Consciousness*, 14.

that in a diverse learning environment, expansive education on topics such as race, gender, economic status takes place outside of class. One of the most extensive studies on this subject was done in 1996 entitled *The Impact of Diversity on Students*. It examined over one hundred and twenty-five sources and found “positive results from diversity. Their... review suggests that most diversity initiatives have a direct and positive impact on students.”⁵ The American Council on Education conducted a survey on this topic with five hundred and seventy-five faculty members across the country who responded that “diversity gives students new perspectives... [and] it helps students with critical thinking and leadership skills.”⁶ Heather McGee writes, “The dividends to diversity in education pay out over a lifetime. Cultural competency is a necessity in today’s multicultural professional world, and U.S. corporations spend about eight billion dollars a year on diversity training.”⁷

Yet, in spite of this and other data supporting the value of diversity in education, its actual attainment remains a daunting task. Educational professional Dr. Eugene Garcia, former dean of University of California, Berkley, Graduate School of Education and a leading researcher in multicultural and bilingual education, states the following:

Cultural and social diversity is not a new issue... it has been a challenge through the ages... Plato and Aristotle differed vehemently over whether social diversity or social homogeneity was preferable... Plato concluded that homogeneity was preferable... Plato concluded that homogeneity minimized political tensions and

⁵ Yolanda Moses and Jenny Banh. “Diversity Literature Review in Higher Education; The Next Research Agenda.” *Multiculturalism in Higher Education Journal* (2010): 1–23.
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1s4679q5>

⁶ Jenny Banh, “Diversity Literature Review in Higher Education,” 3–4.

⁷ Heather McGee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (New York, NY: One World, 2021), 181.

favoritism, whereas Aristotle... concluded that diversity fostered inventiveness and creativity.⁸

When proponents for homogeneity see diversity emerging in local schools, they declare, “Why are they sending ‘these kids’ to our schools?” Gary Howard puts it succinctly, “The answer to this question is quite simple. They live here. The growing presence of diversity in our public-school population is the current reality in our classrooms and will become even more prominent in the face of our future... Diversity is not a choice, but our responses to it certainly are.”⁹

While there are many sociopolitical, institutional, individual and ideological factors working against diversity and inclusion in education, educators committed to honoring diversity find support in a theory known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD was first proposed by Dr. Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist in the early decades of the twentieth century, but his work did not become known in the West until the 1970’s. Vygotsky focused his attention and research on the viewpoint that cognition was a “sociocultural process.” He believed that “minds do not exist in a vacuum... Cognitive development is never static but always interactive with the environment.”¹⁰ If cognition is truly a sociocultural process, as Vygotsky suggests, then the understanding of the “importance of context in learning” is crucial.¹¹ Vygotsky argued that learning was a

⁸ Eugene Garcia, *Student Cultural Diversity: Understanding and Meeting the Challenge* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 3.

⁹ Gary R. Howard, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2016), 7.

¹⁰ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities, 10th Edition* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010), 42–43.

¹¹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes: Creating Multicultural Learning Communities, 10th Edition* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010), 42–45.

“social and cultural rather than individual process.”¹² Sonia Nieto records that, “The idea that cognition is social and cultural action takes learning out of the passive arena in which it often is located...No longer is it possible to separate learning from the cultural context in which it takes place, or from an understanding of how culture and society influence and are influenced by learning.”¹³

Within this framework, Vygotsky came up with the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development Theory (ZPD). His definition of ZPD was “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.”¹⁴ Vygotsky envisioned a zone, or a social learning environment. The student resides in this zone with their current cognitive ability and their potential ability for learning and future cognition, in interaction with a network of adult teachers and fellow students. Moll and Whitmore write, “Vygotsky used this concept to emphasize the importance— in fact the inseparability— of sociocultural conditions for understanding thinking and its development.”¹⁵

Educational scholars advocating for the importance of diversity in the educational

¹² Alex Kozilin, Boris Gindus, Vladimir S. Andrew, and Suzanne M. Miller, *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.

¹³ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 45.

¹⁴ Seth Chaiklin, “The Zone of Proximal Development in Vygotsky’s Analysis of Learning and Instruction,” in *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*, eds. Alex Kozilin, Boris Gindus, Vladimir S. Andrew, Suzanne M. Miller (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 68.

¹⁵ Luis C. Moll and Kathryn F. Whitmore, “Vygotsky in Classroom Practice: Moving from Individual Transmission to Social Transaction,” in *Contexts for Learning: Sociocultural Dynamics in Children's Development*, eds. Ellice A. Forman, Norris Minick, and C. Addison Stone (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

process contend that the educational system in the West initially applied ZPD too narrowly. Western interpreters understood the “zone” simply through the individual student’s perspective and not the collective.¹⁶ “English-speaking scholars interpret the concept [ZPD] more narrowly than Vygotsky intended... he viewed thinking not as a characteristic of the child only, but of the child-in-social-activities with others.” Thus, diversity proponents in education like to refer to the theory of “collective” ZPD.¹⁷ One expert in ZPD puts it this way: “Experience has shown that the child with the larger zone of proximal development will do much better in school.”¹⁸

Appreciating this “zone” where comprehensive learning takes place is a very different concept than what some call “‘Banking Education,’ or depositing knowledge into students who are thought of as empty receptacles.”¹⁹ The effects of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation exacerbated this concept of simply “depositing information” as the standard for school performance. Subsequently, federal (and sometimes state) funding became measured by standardized testing at various grade levels. This created a further disregard for social and cultural factors at work in classrooms and schools, as the almighty test result became the singular object of pursuit. NCLB “constricted the curriculum” entirely toward testing and “the achievement of

¹⁶ This is yet another result of a non-diverse perspective as Individualism is a Cultural Value predominant in the West and Anglo cultures, while Collectivism is a Cultural Value associated with most non-Anglo cultures. See for example, David Livermore, *Leading with Cultural Intelligence* (New York, NY: AMACOM, 2016), 100102.

¹⁷ Luis C. Moll and Kathryn F. Whitmore, “Vygotsky in Classroom Practice,” 19.

¹⁸ Yuri V. Karpov, *Vygotsky for Educators* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 22.

¹⁹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 3.

Latino and African-American students [in particular] has almost universally suffered.”²⁰

Taken together with a lack of awareness or intentional neglect of the environment where learning takes place (ZPD), and the direct effect of that environment on students’ development and achievement, this kind of rote input of data-based learning can undermine holistic learning and development.

Sonia Nieto, a renowned expert in multicultural education, feels that paying attention to ZPD and its effects on learning supports five important principles for learning: 1) “Learning is actively constructed” — with respect for “Learner Agency,” where students, teachers and peers are active together in the process; 2) “Learning emerges from and builds on experience;” 3) “Learning is influenced by cultural differences;” 4) “Learning is influenced by the context in which it emerges;” and 5) “Learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and community.” She concludes, “If learning can be influenced by social mediation, then conditions can be created in schools that can help most students learn... If we accept Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD, then failure to learn cannot be defined as individual failure but rather systemic failure.”²¹ If ZPD supports these five aspects of educational growth, then the same conclusion can be made for spiritual growth. If learning is actively constructed in the context of being active together, then the supporting cast surrounding one’s individual faith development is crucial. Spiritual growth can also only go so far if it is “Banking Spiritual Education” where data is deposited into “empty receptacles” from pulpits. The next four principles that contend that learning 1) emerges from and builds on experience;

²⁰ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 18-21..

²¹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 35-47.

2) learning is influenced by cultural differences; 3) learning is influenced from the context from which it emerges, and 4) learning is socially mediated and developed within a culture or context all point to lived diversity within the context of a local congregation being an all-important component for spiritual growth. In a homogenous congregation, limited experiences due to a lack of cultural differences creates a stale and restricted context. This is not a context wherein expansive learning is “socially mediated.” It is difficult to see these constrained environments as productive incubators where individuals can grow “to know” and “be filled with all the fullness” that Paul yearns for in Ephesians 3:19. Lived diversity is needed in educational and spiritual contexts to achieve “best results” in learning and understanding in both arenas.

The ZPD Theory specifically underscores how environment, culture and context directly affect cognition and learning. If this is the case in cognitive development in the field of education, it would also apply in the same way to spiritual development. The cultures and experiences residing in our zone of proximal development have enormous implications for our spiritual and educational growth. If that zone is continually homogeneous, the growth will be incomplete. As one scholar states, “The alternative to multicultural education is monocultural education, which reflects only one reality and is biased.”²² That is why many call multicultural education a “reform movement.” James Banks, a founding voice in multicultural education states that it helps “individuals gain

²² Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (New York, NY: Pearson, 2018), 35.

greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures” in their proximal zones.²³

In many cases, the tragedy of what many scholars refer to as the “resegregation” of American schools impedes this from taking place. Due to segregated “residential housing patterns” that lead to “racial steering” in schools, as well as by “rulings by courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, that have dismantled voluntary desegregation plans,” schools have become increasingly ethnically and culturally segregated. As a result of these disastrous factors, “African-Americans and Latinos are more segregated in U.S. schools than they have been in the past 40 years.”²⁴ Sheryll Cashin observes:

Public schools became more segregated in the 1990’s... It is an unspoken truth that we do not own up to: America’s schools are separate and unequal.... As a result of this resegregation trend, seven out of ten black and Latino students attend primarily [segregated] minority schools... White students are the most racially segregated group in public schools. On average a white student attends a school that is [at least] 80 percent white... Such segregated schooling comes with serious costs.²⁵

Studies have shown that

Students [of all ethnicities] who attend diverse K-12 schools achieve better learning outcomes and even higher test scores, particularly in areas such as math and science... White students at racially diverse schools develop more cultural competency – the ability to collaborate and feel at ease with people from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds— than students who attended segregated schools... Their minds are also improving when it comes to critical thinking and problem solving.²⁶

²³ James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education, 6th Edition* (New York, NY: Pearson, 2019), 1-3.

²⁴ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 12-13.

²⁵ Sheryll Cashin, *The Failure of Integration: How Race and Class are Undermining The American Dream* (New York, NY: Public Affairs (Perseus), 2004), 202, 218-219.

²⁶ Heather McGee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, 181.

This directly relates to Vygotsky's proposition, "Exposure to multiple viewpoints leads to more flexible and creative thinking and greater ability to solve problems."²⁷ While ZPD clearly lays out the positive effects of the make-up of students' "proximal zone," and educators have proven the value of diversity within that "zone," sociopolitical and cultural trends are undermining that in tragic ways.

Similarly, if our spiritual formation, education and growth takes place in segregated "zones of proximal development," impeded by cultural trends, denominational bureaucracy or unbendable tradition, it will have debilitating effects. Cultural biases and a lack of wider viewpoints and experiences will stunt spiritual growth. The evidence that far too many Christians are experiencing a lack of diversity in their corporate and individual walks of faith is stark. The authors of the groundbreaking book, *Divided By Faith* discovered the extent to which American Christians resided in ethnically segregated churches and neighborhoods and lived segregated everyday lives. This lack of diversity in religious zones of proximal development produced its own disastrous results. "Religion, as structured in America, is unable to make a great impact on the racialized society. In fact, far from knocking down racial barriers, religion generally serves to maintain these historical divides and helps to develop new ones... American religion leads to racially segregated congregations."²⁸ The number of churches in America with at least 20 percent diversity in their worshipping congregations (a sociologically chosen percentage to indicate more than 'token' diversity, but a potential

²⁷ Heather McGee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*, 181.

²⁸ Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 18-19.

sharing of power and influence) grew from a dismal 6 percent in 1998 to 16 percent in 2019. While that is encouraging, the fact remains that 84 percent of American Christians reside in zones of spiritual proximal development that are not diverse in significant ways.

One may argue that all spiritual development does not occur communally; as individual spiritual growth does occur outside of the church also. The statistics do not bear out a better story on that front either. Gary Howard noted that recent reporting states that “over 90 percent of White Americans’ social interactions are with other white people, less than 10 percent with people of color.”²⁹ Lack of diversity in ZPD impedes development of “cultural competency... ability to collaborate... flexible and creative... critical thinking”³⁰ among students in the field of education. This project contends that the same holds true in developing “fullness” (Eph. 3:19, *NIV*) in faith development also. One educational scholar, commenting on the quest to expand diversity in student bodies, staff leadership and curriculum, defined this work as: “A movement designed to empower all students to become knowledgeable, caring and active citizens in a deeply troubled and ethnically polarized nation and world.”³¹ That certainly sounds like a directive for those whom Christ calls to be his ambassadors in the world as well (2 Cor. 5:20, *NIV*).

The diversity that was divinely orchestrated in the Early Church and specifically outlined in the Acts 16:11–40 pericope presented in Chapter 2, had a goal similar to that of diversity in education, especially as it applies to diverse learning styles and

²⁹ Gary R. Howard, *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, 18.

³⁰ Heather McGee, *The Sum of Us*, 181.

³¹ James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, 11.

empowering diverse leaders. The Council of Jerusalem is described in Acts 15 as convened specifically to address the growing diversity in the emerging church—in their case, Gentile diversity and inclusion. The Council (the bureaucracy of the time) removes structural impediments and decides that no circumcision will be required of Gentile believers and that they will not be held to a complete adherence to Mosaic Law. This frees Paul's mission for Gentile inclusion, furthering more and more diversity in Christ's Church. This also shows the liberating effect on Paul individually as he now operates in a diverse ZPD after aggressively and violently clinging to a homogenous one. After Paul's personal transformation from his prior prejudice and lack of development due to a homogeneous (entirely Jewish) ZPD, he becomes a transformational leader championing the cause of developing diverse congregations that celebrated the diversity of God's creation and those created in God's image.

Similarly, proponents of more diverse schools, curriculum, student interaction and leaders, insist that personal transformation of leaders (specifically teachers) leads to structural change and is a necessary component to attaining that goal. Sonia Nieto writes:

Multicultural education, like all good teaching is about transformation... Multicultural education is a journey: Beginning with their personal transformation, teachers can move on to create more productive ways of working with others, and from there to challenge the policies and practices of the schools in which they work... Until teachers undergo a personal transformation, little will change in our schools... [It] begins with the vision of a leader, typically a principal... a teacher, superintendent, curriculum director or department chair.³²

Additionally, Nieto notes that these transformational leaders in education share the following characteristics: "1) They have a sociocultural consciousness... 2) They have positive views about students from... diverse backgrounds 3) They are agents of

³² Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 4, 26-27.

change.”³³ This is an apt description of the Paul who arrives in Philippi in Acts 16. This transformed former Pharisee now has a “consciousness” and “positive view” of diverse “others” that he once scorned. Transformed leaders who are able to transcend their former “cultural bubble”³⁴ are key factors in establishing diverse learning environments in both education and faith development. Transformed, diverse leaders recruit and empower other diverse leaders, as witnessed by Lydia in Acts 16 who becomes the first house church host and leader (Acts 16:15). This is also illustrated in the diverse leadership board of the church at Antioch described by Luke in Acts 13:1 who come from five different continents.

Diverse leaders in the field of education become “cultural accommodators and mediators.”³⁵ Some are called “whole-language teachers,”³⁶ “bridge builders,”³⁷ “guide[s] and supporter[s]...facilitator[s]... active participant[s] in community,”³⁸ encouragers and fellow learners and explorers together within their diverse student bodies’ ZPD. Acts 16: 11–40 (and e.g., Acts 6:17, Acts 8:4–40, Acts 10, Acts 11:19–21) depicts a church growing in diverse leadership as formerly monocultural leaders cross boundaries into diversity. As this happens, the church grows in overall diversity, inclusion and mutual love and respect.

³³ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 210.

³⁴ Richard D. Buchner, *Diversity Consciousness*, 98.

³⁵ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 99-100.

³⁶ Luis C. Moll and Kathryn F. Whitmore, “Vygotsky in Classroom Practice,” 20.

³⁷ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 141.

³⁸ Ellice Forman, Norris Minick, and Addison C. Stone, *Contexts for Learning: Sociocultural Dynamics in Children’s Development* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 38.

Unfortunately, diverse leaders are often absent even in diverse schools and diverse communities of faith. “The student body in the U.S. is becoming more diverse than ever, while the teacher population is becoming less so;” as teachers of color are “deplorably underrepresented.”³⁹ Of the 2.3 million educators in the U.S., only 10 percent are teachers of color, and that number is declining.⁴⁰ Among even the minority of churches that recorded at least 20 per cent diversity in 2019, most were led by white lead pastors. While that number did decrease from 87 percent white-pastor-led in 1998 to 70 percent white-pastor-led in 2019, there is still a notable deficiency. “Multiracial churches are often previously predominantly white churches that have made an intentional effort to become more diverse. Many, if not most, of these churches have mostly white leadership,” and some “all-white”.⁴¹ Persons of Color in these contexts are often glaringly absent from executive staff, even in church staffs where diversity is represented. In schools and faith communities committed to greater diversity, a lack of transformational and diverse leaders in the ZPD is a debilitating factor for both educational and spiritual development.

The need for and challenge of obtaining more diversity in the ZPD intersects with the Historical Foundations study presented Chapter 3 as well. This especially applies to the detrimental aspect of pressures to assimilate. When there are systems and structures set up for homogeneity with a dominant power structure, there is great pressure upon

³⁹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 61.

⁴⁰ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 61, 124.

⁴¹ Michael O. Emerson, “Multi- & Mono-: The Realities of Diversity in U.S. Churches,” in *Beyond Diversity*, ed. XX (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2021), 25. Other statistics reported by Emerson at Mosaix Global Network National Conference, Keller, TX, November 2019.

non-majority groups to assimilate to the norms, patterns and cultural values of the majority group. Nieto writes, “Diverse backgrounds, experiences, languages may... enrich the learning of students, but often they are perceived as handicaps by an assimilationist society bent on encouraging cultural and linguistic homogeneity.”⁴² This tendency of forced assimilation born out of nationalism, exceptionalism and supremacist ideologies undermines the existence of true diversity as a valuable operating element in the ZPD of both students and adults.

The richness of sharing different viewpoints, cultural perspectives, linguistic differences, and different life experiences is lost in the ZPD as these aspects are suppressed to conform to an assimilationist mold. Beyond that, as Nieto writes, “the pressure that schools place on students to assimilate culturally and linguistically is itself an example of inequality.” For example, Nieto notes that in America “white teachers by and large accept a ‘color blind’ stance as fair and impartial.”⁴³ Yet, in truth, this whitewashing of culture makes non-majority students feel devalued. Nieto painfully observes: “For too many black students school is simply the place where, more concerted, persistently, and authoritatively than anywhere else in society, they learn how little valued they are.”⁴⁴ This causes non-majority educators to reject the concept of being “color blind” as simply a softening of the reality of pressure being imposed on non-majority students to assimilate. Most of them “perceive it as unfair and even racist.”⁴⁵ In

⁴² Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 117.

⁴³ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 62.

⁴⁴ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 124.

⁴⁵ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 62.

a refreshing contrast, educators who value the presence of diversity in the ZPD learning environment “not only... ‘see’ their students’ differences, but they also acknowledge the intrinsic worth of such differences and they use them as strengths and as a starting point in teaching.”⁴⁶

The failure to see and understand the tragic effects of racism undermined the Methodist movement at its inception. An underserved devaluing of God-intended diversity and the forcing of other cultures—created equally in the image of God—to assimilate to the dominant culture fueled the opposition that Richard Allen faced. Allen was a great leader and captivating preacher who inspired black, white and Native American listeners alike. Allen and other Africans were drawn to the Methodist movement due to its passionate worship, its willingness to preach and teach the gospel with simplicity, and its commitment to antislavery. On the surface, one would think that these two groups were made for one another, yet that dream was decimated by white supremacist based power, position and privilege unwilling to give quarter and make room for diverse others in the end.

In a recent article, two scholars in multicultural education give a helpful theater image of the “Front Stage” and the “Back Stage.” With many dominant groups, such as white leadership in Early American Methodism, so-called “colored blindness” shows up in “politeness and tolerance” that is presented on the front stage. On the back stages of people’s lives, however, where intimate life is lived and power is executed, other questions are asked. “So *what* are you?” and “Where are you *really* from?” Macro and micro aggressions spring forth because the back stage is “sacred space where ‘the other’

⁴⁶ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 62.

does not belong.”⁴⁷ This is a compelling observation that could explain how an Early Methodist movement that seemed so egalitarian with revivals and camp meetings that attracted large, diverse crowds and were open to all in a non-segregated way, became fractured along ethnic lines. The movement seemed to empower diverse leaders on the Front Stage. Yet mindsets and prejudice which did not include lived diversity on the back stage led to the infamous incident at St. George’s M.E. Church in Philadelphia, where diverse others were literally thrown out the front door. This event has left the American Methodist Church family, by definition, segregated to this very day. It is a historical moment that Black Historian Albert Raboteau has called “the most famous event in African-American religious history. Because it is such a dramatic and clear-cut example of racial discrimination that has constantly marred religious life in this country.”⁴⁸ Allen was strong armed to assimilate to American racist white culture, and his refusal and inability to do so led him to become a religious leader known as a pioneer of black autonomy who, to the end of his days, still dreamed of a diverse and multiethnic church. Nieto observes, “All... beliefs are harbored, consciously or not, within a particular society. Some of these concern culture, race, ethnicity, and social class, and they can work their way into teachers’ and school policies and practices even if individuals do not subscribe to them.”⁴⁹ Beverly Daniel Tatum describes “toxic ideologies about race as

⁴⁷ Leslie H. Picca and Ruth Thompson-Miller, “Backstage Racism: Implications for Teaching,” in *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, 10th Edition, ed. James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks (Indianapolis, IN: Wiley, (2020), 161-162.

⁴⁸ Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1995), 80.

⁴⁹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 5.

‘smog in the air.’ Although we may not see it, it affects all of us.”⁵⁰ In the zone of proximal development of students and the contemporary church (similar to Early— and tragically current— American Methodism), this “smog” thwarts diversity, demeans cultures, and requires assimilation. It likewise hampers educational and spiritual development from growing into “fullness” (Eph. 3:19).

Finally, the interdisciplinary discipline of education, and specifically the theory of ZPD, are connected with and instructive to the assertions of the Theological Foundations presented in Chapter 4. In that chapter, the doctrine of the Trinity was explored, with particular attention to the idea of the Persons of the Trinity as living, existing and relating in “differentiated unity.” In many ways it can be viewed as an image of the Three Persons of the Trinity living in an eternal zone of proximal development where the Godhead lives in the reality of the fullness of this blessed community. Living eternally in this divine “zone of eternal relationship.” Richard Rohr has said: “All authentic knowledge of God is *participatory knowledge*,”⁵¹ and Boff declares that “God desires all of creation to participate in God’s aim for the harmony or well-being of all creation.”⁵² Like an effective facilitator, teacher and mediator of ZPD, the triune God invites us into the process of learning and development with God’s own self and with one another in perpetual “collaborative learning.”⁵³ ZPD states that “learning occurs essentially in a

⁵⁰ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 5.

⁵¹ Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 49.

⁵² Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God*, 83.

⁵³ Richard D. Buchner, *Diversity Consciousness*, 292.

community of others;”⁵⁴ and students “grow into the intellectual life of those around them.”⁵⁵ Jesus’ Trinitarian language portrays this learning, living, loving community that people have been invited into: “Father... All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I have been glorified in them... so that they may be one, as we are one... The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one” (John 17:1, 10–11, 22–23).

Educators speaking about diversity in the ZPD of learning and development begin to sound strangely theological, asserting that “Learners’ construction of knowledge is facilitated by horizontal as well as vertical interactions.”⁵⁶ One educational practitioner committed to diversity says that so-called “color blind classrooms... [where teachers say] ‘I only see students,’” are “demeaning. God sees color or God would not have created it.”⁵⁷ The triune God opens outward and invites all humanity into relationship, as one with God, one with each other, and one with all the world. In many ways God’s ZPD is represented in all human community and all creation where people grow and develop as they are invited into the life of God. The triune God seeks reconciliation and renewal within and for the human community that God loves. Jesus gives his Church the common mission of kingdom building and seeks for them to be one in differentiated unity in pursuit of that goal. Along the way, people of faith grow more into “fullness” (Eph. 3:19), as they do this sacred work together as a diverse community. Proponents of ZPD

⁵⁴ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 112.

⁵⁵ Ellice Forman, Norris Minick, and Addison C. Stone, *Contexts for Learning*, 82.

⁵⁶ Ellice Forman, Norris Minick, and Addison C. Stone, *Contexts for Learning*, 292.

⁵⁷ Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, *Affirming Diversity*, 135-136.

theory say, “The benefits of collaborative learning among students of diverse backgrounds are well known... Particularly effective teachers of learners of diverse backgrounds typically have developed learning communities that are collaborative rather than individualistic.” They come to a “table together... They meet around it and through it for mutual inquiry.”⁵⁸ This is the table that Jesus offered and still offers at every celebration of the Lord’s Supper for people to “come from east and west, from north and south, and... eat” together in differentiated unity and mutual love (Luke 13:29). This is the community that the Persons of the Trinity call into being, and when that community fractures from heterogeneity into homogeneity, it lacks the ability to grow together into God’s intended “fullness” (Eph. 3:19).

Lived diversity represented in one’s own Zone of Proximal Development is something that all should strive for in educational and spiritual development. One educator has stated that “to become a multicultural teacher, one needs to become a multicultural person first.... This means stepping out of our own world and learning to understand some of the experiences, values and realities of others. It is sometimes an exhilarating experience, but it also can be uncomfortable and challenging.”⁵⁹ Growth is never easy. In physiology, they speak of the reality of “growing pains,” and even the birth of a child involves the spilling of blood. People of faith will never fully grow, whether as individuals or as faith communities, if they continually retreat into corners of individualistic preference, past experience and homogeneity. Kingdom work, as Jesus

⁵⁸ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 121-123.

⁵⁹ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 177-178.

defined it, is done by people who “deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34).

This kind of work is challenging and involves sacrifice as Jesus contends, but it leads to a new kind of kingdom richness. A teacher “stepped out” of her homogeneous school to take up the role of educator at an extremely diverse school with above average diverse leadership. Early on, she reported her experience in this new community: “Conversations in the staff room weren’t so negative... [comments were] less outrageous, less anti-kid and most definitely not blatantly racist... And so, no matter how a teacher thought or felt, kids were treated with respect.”⁶⁰ Another teacher at a diverse school where diversity was of high value throughout the learning community and process said,

The reward in such classrooms [and environments] is that everyone gets smarter together, including the teacher, while at the same time maintaining, strengthening, and honoring our differences... For the sake of our students and the future of the world, [these] endeavors invite us into a lifetime of work... We are like a people caught between two lands. There is the old country of oppression and racism from which we are attempting to emigrate, and the new country of hope, transformation, and healing that we are now beginning to explore and inhabit... The road is neither straight nor easy. It is neither well mapped nor well-traveled. It is a journey fraught with ambiguity, complexity, and dissonance.⁶¹

Scripture speaks of these kinds of sacrificial travelers this way:

By faith [they] looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God... [Many of them] died without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better homeland, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:8, 10, 13–16).

⁶⁰ Sonia Nieto, *The Light in Their Eyes*, 63.

⁶¹ Gary R. Howard, *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know*, 140-143.

People of faith need to follow the path of these brave educators who gave up the idols of personal comfort and familiarity to grow individually and help grow a community flourishing in a ZPD of diversity. Saul the Pharisee knew the law of God better than most, but only when his ZPD expanded as he became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, and a builder of a diverse church did he begin to grow into the “fullness” that God intended for him (Eph. 3:19). Paul tells his story after spending many seasons in a new and diverse ZPD. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I gave up childish ways” (1 Cor. 13:11). In lay language he is saying, “I grew up;” and, he adds, that will not happen collectively in the Church “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). May all people who proclaim the name of Jesus follow in Christ’s footsteps -- footsteps that these brave and committed educators are following, whether they perceive it through the eyes of faith or not. That journey is the one that God in Christ desires for all those created in the image of the triune God, and it always leads to God’s diverse and Beloved Community.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

The preceding chapters and conclusions have presented the case for the need for “lived diversity” in individual and corporate faith development. This is a crucial moment for the American Church to embrace this understanding. The urgency is not due simply to the radically changing demographics of the United States and the Church’s ability or non-ability to communicate the gospel effectively to a growing ocean of ethnic and cultural diversity. Rather, this shift must happen to prevent what Dr. King warned of as the American Church’s continued descent into irrelevancy, speaking and conducting itself “without moral or spiritual authority.”¹ Lived diversity is not merely a concept to help “fix the church” and potentially reverse its numerical decline. Rather, diversity was and is God’s idea for the identity and purpose of Christ’s Church, making it a vessel for the ministry of reconciliation in the world (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Chapter 4 made the case that the fall of humanity was not simply an individual fall from right relationship with our Creator God, but also a corporate fall where the community of humanity fell from relationship with the Community of Persons in the triune God. The human community also fractured as they fell from relationship with one another, as illustrated in Genesis 11:1–9. At Pentecost in Acts 2:1–13, described by many as the “birth of the Church,” we

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 97.

see the curse of “confused speech” that resulted from the corporate sin of the Tower of Babel story begin to be redeemed. The diversity of the human community was preserved as each spoke in their “own native language,” yet all “heard” one common message of salvation (Acts 2:8).

As the Early Church expanded in this ministry beyond the ethnic, cultural and nationalist boundaries of the culture around it, it displayed lived diversity in the Christian community as a vehicle for reconciliation (Acts 8:4ff; Acts 10). In Acts 9, a Pharisee named Saul who was a nationalistic, racist and misogynistic murderer “breathing violence” against Christians (Acts 9:1) was called by the risen Christ into the work of building the beloved community. After experiencing the forgiveness and grace of this community, he was renamed and commissioned to be the apostle to the very ethnic enemies that he so desperately hated (Gentiles). As noted in Chapter 5, Paul himself grew spiritually in this mission as he experienced the glory of lived diversity individually and corporately in a whole new community of diverse brothers and sisters. The “scales that fell from Paul’s eyes” were the result of the sin of a spiritual blindness to God and others. When “his sight was restored... he got up and was baptized” (Acts 9:18) and was now unfettered in building and living as part of God’s diverse beloved community.

Paul would speak to his former Gentile enemies that God’s desire was to build “one new humanity in place of the two” (Eph. 2:15). Then, in the first six verses of Ephesians 3, he explains “the reason” for his entire ministry (Eph. 3:1). It is to declare that “the mystery of Christ” that has now been “made known to humankind... That is, the Gentiles have become fellow-heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (Eph. 3:4–6). There are no borders or

boundaries in the Kingdom of God. Jesus says that people will come from the four corners of the universe to live and dwell in God's diverse and beloved community (Luke 13:29). After experiencing this truth and receiving this revelation, Paul declares that the great mystery of God's borderless kingdom has now been revealed and made visible in Christ's Church.

This mystery revealed is the guiding principle for the mission and ministry of believers, both individually and collectively as the church. Paul concludes in fervent prayer "for this reason," that all might come to see God's intentions for lived diversity (Eph. 3:14–20). Paul's use of the imagery of "breadth and length and height and depth" (Eph. 3:18) echoes Jesus' illustration of "east and west and north and south" (Luke 13:29). It is the depiction of the four corners of God's beloved community, created in and living out of the very image of the triune God. As we walk, work and worship together as one, valuing and cherishing lived diversity individually and corporately as believers, our faith development is more "fully formed" (Eph. 3:19). As Derwin Gray writes,

I just can't imagine the apostle Paul saying, "I am going to plant a church for Greeks, and a church for Italians, and a church for Jews, and a church for Africans because people like to be with people like themselves." When we are in bubbles of sameness, we are trapped in rooms of ignorance. It is through our differences, in the midst of the beautiful struggle of grace, that deep transformation occurs.²

This project explored the impact of lived diversity in the context of faith development by engaging individuals who are a part of Garfield Memorial Church in Greater Cleveland, Ohio, a healthy multiethnic church, and a national teaching church in

² Derwin L. Gray, *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible says, and the First Christians knew about Racial Reconciliation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022), 125.

the Multiethnic Church Movement. Two small groups, whose combined participants totaled forty people, were engaged in weekly meetings from February 1, 2023 through March 29, 2023. Through intentional recruitment, each group was comprised of a nearly 50/50 ratio of Anglo participants to Persons of Color. There was also significant and intentional gender and economic diversity. The groups were distinct, in that one group was comprised of individuals with significant church background. Quite a few of them had become disenfranchised along their way back to church membership and involvement at Garfield Memorial Church. Almost all in this group had some significant contact at one point in their lives with church— one might use the common phrase, “raised in church.” One hundred percent of them, however, were “raised” and involved in homogeneous churches prior to their membership and involvement at Garfield Memorial Church. The age of this group ranged, for the most part, between the ages of 55–75, with two members in their 40’s. The second small group was comprised of a younger demographic newer to church in general and Garfield Memorial Church in particular. Several did have previous church experiences, but for most it was sporadic, and more a result of family obligation as children. One individual, for example, shared that he was raised in the Lutheran Church as a child, but left as soon as he entered high school when he was no longer obligated by his parents to attend. Now, as a fairly successful forty-something professional, he confessed to the group that he and his wife only came to Garfield Memorial Church in hopes of getting their child baptized. He said:

I thought it was good strategy to attend a couple times so the pastors might see us as prospective members (which we had no intention of becoming), in order to get them to agree to baptize our daughter. That was our intention for coming but we found so much more.

The age range of this group was 29–45, with one participant who was age 59.

Prior to their participation in this project, each group member was individually invited by me as the Principal Investigator of this project, or by Rev. Terry McHugh, a Context Associate for the project who is also the Executive Pastor of Garfield Memorial Church. The purpose, scope and expectations for involvement in this project were discussed as part of the recruitment process. Upon agreement, participants received and signed a United Theological Seminary Letter of Consent for the project (Appendix A). Participants filled out a Pre-Project Survey (Appendix B) that helped to set a baseline as to where they were in their journey of experiencing and valuing lived diversity within their life of faith; and also filled out a Post-Project Survey (Appendix C), which included the same questions from the Pre-Project Survey, with three additional questions pertinent to their involvement and learning in this small group project. The questions were constructed to reveal some sense of cultural competence and empathy, theological understanding of the Biblical vision and mandate for committing to lived diversity as followers of Christ, and personal awareness of the impact or non-impact of their current experience of lived diversity within their individual and corporate faith development. Questions also sought to expose their level of motivation for involvement in a diverse faith community, and some sense of awareness as to the obstacles and objections that need to be overcome in the pursuit of such.

Curriculum for small groups was researched in order to evaluate which resource would be most likely to lead to wholesome self-examination and healthy and productive small group dialogue. The three considered were:

1) *Multiethnic Conversations: An Eight-Week Journey Toward Unity in Your Church*, Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

This resource is specifically written for small groups to meet for eight weeks and reflect upon the theology, history, contextual considerations, relationships, communication, and competence required for living out faith in a multiethnic church context. Garfield Memorial Church has utilized this resource since its printing in 2016, and have had well over eight hundred participants from both the church and community over that period of time.

2) *How We Love Matters: A Call to Practice Relentless Racial Reconciliation*, Albert Tate (New York, NY: Faith Words, 2022).

This book urges readers to acknowledge that racism exists in the Church, and believes that a deeper commitment to discipleship can drive it out. Tate advocates for truth-telling on this matter internally, spiritually and relationally. Commitment to discipleship in light of this truth-telling can lead the church into deeper mutual love and racial reconciliation.

3) *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and the First Christians Knew About Racial Reconciliation*, Derwin L. Gray (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022).

This writing reflects upon the Biblical roots of multiethnic ministry. Gray supports the concept that “lived diversity” was God’s goal for God’s people evidenced in God’s call to Abraham and Sarah to go and extend God’s blessing to “**all** the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:3, emphasis added). In Jesus, he sees the fulfillment of this call in Jesus’ boundary breaking ministry and the formation of Christ’s post-resurrection, Spirit-empowered, boundary-breaking church. This Biblical witness should ground the

Church's discipleship to "engage in difficult conversations, mourn injustice and display gospel character," all in the pursuit of reconciliation.³

Beyond immersion into material like this and intense interaction with regularly scheduled small group meetings as delineated above, two case study interviews were held with unique individuals who both experienced exponential spiritual growth when lived diversity became part of their faith development. One individual is a well-known national church leader. He planted one of the largest churches in the Midwest, has written several books and is a sought-after speaker and consultant at some of the largest church conferences in the United States. He is Anglo and the majority of his church involvement and leadership has been in the homogeneous white church in an area of Ohio whose demographic is 97% white. He is currently leading a top-level, widely known organization training pastors and new church plants across the world. As president, he inherited a predominantly homogeneous church planting network, and he has sought to transform it into a more multiethnic organization with diversity as a core value. His fourteen-year-old son, adopted as an infant, is African American. In the last few years, this leader came into an awareness of what he calls "kingdom diversity," wherein he and his wife are now active at Garfield Memorial Church.

The other individual is a retired engineer from Rockwell Automation. He became the first African American high-level engineer in his department in the 1970s in an otherwise all-white executive team. Most of his church exposure was in his youth, and about forty-five years ago during his first marriage, which lasted five years. All of that

³ Derwin L. Gray, *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible says, and the First Christians knew about Racial Reconciliation* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2022), Chapters 8-11, 171-232.

experience was in African American homogeneous churches. Twelve years ago, he and his wife became active members at Garfield Memorial Church, and for the last ten years he has served in executive leadership of the church as the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees. He had a wide experience lived diversity in his secular life: in addition to his “day job” as a Rockwell executive, he also became part of a NASCAR team and is a former military member. But that lived diversity never extended into his life as a member of a church. The reason for including case studies was to put individuals on the “witness stand” to give an honest account (1 Pet. 3:15–16) in a safe environment about their personal faith journey, spiritual growth and transformation.

Creating the bonds of trust and safety in the confines of confidentiality in a small group of persons is an effective means for honest and sometimes difficult conversations. Part of the difficulty in measuring the impact of “lived diversity” in faith development is that there are far too few churches that provide the setting for it to be experienced; and for the most part it is rarely discussed or taught. Like racism itself, it is easier ignored than discussed in society, and unfortunately that is the case in far too many ethnically segregated churches and faith communities.

For a reliable glimpse of the effect of lived diversity upon personal faith development, it is necessary to look beyond information presented from pulpits or PowerPoint presentations, or the exclusive use of scientific tools to gather data. Deep, reflective thought and conversations are required, both individually and collectively. Individual thought and conversation happens when a participant encounters curriculum and resources like those described above and engages in thoughtful “conversation” with the author. This kind of solitary conversation was fostered by informing participants that

they would have the opportunity to have a group conversation with the author via Zoom following the conclusion of the group. Participants were encouraged to write comments and questions during the weeks of the small group study, so that the environment was created where they were having that conversation all along. Collective conversation occurred in the small group gatherings where members could grow, encourage and challenge one another's thoughts and perspectives in safety. This methodology was the best method for "mining the deep" and uncovering the impact or non-impact that experiencing lived diversity was having upon spiritual formation both individually and corporately.

The project was implemented through recruitment in December of 2022, as McHugh and I held individual conversations with potential participants for the small group component of the project. The purpose and scope of the study was discussed, and its value for the church was emphasized. A regular and established small group Bible Study, called "Foundations Group," was identified as an ideal group to comprise the older, more established in church culture group. The leaders of the group were consulted, and they in turn discussed it with the group. Twenty-four participants agreed to a ten-week journey together by being part of this project, commencing Wednesday, February 1, 2023 and running through March 29, 2023, meeting weekly from 7:00–8:30 p.m. They also agreed to the subsequent gathering with the author of the curriculum. They will herein be referred to as "Group A." This group was comprised of eleven Caucasians and thirteen Person of Color: five White males, six White females, five African American males, seven African American females and one Bi-Racial female.

From the interviews referred to above, sixteen participants that fit the profile for the “younger, less connected with church culture group” agreed to meet together for nine weeks. They gathered on Tuesdays from 6:30–8:00 PM, beginning on February 7, 2023 and continuing through March 28, 2023 (minus Valentine’s Day on February 14th), and also attended the Zoom call with the curriculum author. They will herein be referred to as “Group B.”

An email confirming participation was sent to members of both groups on December 30, 2022, inviting them to pick up the book that would be the focus of our study and the launching point for our conversations. We intentionally chose to do this on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday, January 15, 2023, where our theme was “In Pursuit of the Beloved Community.” It was a commissioning day of sorts for this endeavor, and the significance of picking up their books at the altar that day was not lost on them.

Prior to the launch, the United Theological Seminary Informed Consent Form was created to include information specific to this project. It reiterated that the purpose was to conduct a study on the importance of experiencing “lived diversity” in our individual and corporate spiritual lives. It also delineated expectations for group participation, stated policies around the protection of confidentiality of participants, and detailed any potential risks of participation. The individuals in both groups were asked to sign the Informed Consent Form at the first group meeting. These Informed Consent Forms were also distributed with the books on January 15, 2023 and attached to a subsequent email on January 16, 2023 to all participants. The email also included a description of the Pre-Project Survey as well as a link by which it could be accessed.

The surveys were created in the ShelbyNext church management system platform. All responses were confidential and anonymous. The Pre-Project Survey presented a combination of questions that asked respondents to use a scale to indicate their level of agreement with particular statements, as well as open-ended questions where respondents were asked to provide an individual response. There were sixteen questions in all.

Pre-Project Surveys were utilized to set a baseline for the groups and assess awareness of group members around: 1) The Biblical foundations and mandate for lived diversity as an integral component to the spiritual life of believers and the Church; 2) Effects or non-effects of lived diversity on one's spiritual formation; 3) Cultural competency and empathy, especially toward other cultural groups; and 4) Motivation for living a more multiethnic life. Participants were urged to take the Pre-Project Survey prior to the first session. A total of 27 surveys were received.

One common curriculum was used in order to provide a more reliable tool to measure overall responses and progress across groups. Of the three books referenced above, *How to Heal Our Racial Divide: What the Bible Says, and the First Christians Knew About Racial Reconciliation* [HTH], by Derwin Gray was selected for the purposes of this project. The reasoning for this was as follows: *Multiethnic Conversations*, by Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Okuwobi, is a resource that has been utilized at Garfield Memorial Church since 2016, with more than eight hundred participants over that time. Of the forty participants chosen for this project, more than two-thirds of them had been in a previous eight-week *Multiethnic Conversations* group, and an unbalanced "power dynamic" between those who had participated before and those who had not could skew results. In addition, both Dr. DeYmaz and Dr. Okuwobi have spoken at Garfield

Memorial Church multiple times and are well known leaders by this congregation. This would have eliminated the possibility for both groups to start fresh together with a material and thought leader that none of them had previously been exposed to. *How We Love Matters*, by Albert Tate is an amazing writing that seeks affective change through a series of “Dear _____” letters in an effort to build cultural awareness and arouse cultural empathy. Tate weaves in references to the Biblical underpinnings for this but does not dedicate chapters to those Biblical foundations. By contrast, the opening chapters of *How to Heal Our Racial Divide* delineate the Biblical mandate for lived diversity as a part of God’s intention for followers of Christ in a clear and user-friendly way that is easy for laity to comprehend. Participants were encouraged to familiarize themselves with the material and come prepared to discuss the readings assigned to the opening session.

One of the intentional decisions made for this project was to not to have the Project Investigator lead these groups. He would attend all group meetings to observe, take notes, interject in discussion if led to do so, and ask questions or respond to the questions or thoughts of others. The intention was to observe these groups operating as typical small groups led by indigenous group leaders, rather than by professionally trained thought leader on the subject. The established lay small group leaders facilitated and led Group A, within the framework provided by the Project Investigator. McHugh facilitated and led Group B, but also commissioned lay participants of the group to prepare and lead several meetings along the way. The variance of form honored the “lived diversity” inherent within the corporate life of each group, while unanimity of content remained consistent with the material and purpose of the groups. The opening session of each group included “ground rules,” which consisted in observing Garfield

Memorial Church's five Core Values (Safety, Authenticity, Diversity, Transformation and Reconciliation) with special emphasis on the Core Value of Safety and the need for absolute confidentiality of what was shared in the group.

Each week in Group A, a member or members of the group provided food for participants to come and break bread together just prior to their start time. They opened with prayer requests, prayer updates and pass a prayer journal that they kept documenting prayer requests and praise reports. Leaders then called them to the written material and readings for the week. They shared thoughts and questions that Gray includes at the end of each chapter under the headings of: "Things to Think About" and "Questions to Discuss." A leader re-enforced the focus of the chapter and then shared a thought or question from the closing section of the chapter, beginning by saying how it impacted them, caused them to think, or challenged them. They then sought reactions and sharing on how group members responded to those questions. This elicited very engaged conversations, thoughts and ideas. The interaction was spirited and there were very few "dead spots." At the end of the group meeting, closing thoughts were shared as a type of summary of the night, and a closing prayer offered.

Group B was convened by the group leader asking for participants to share things from the assigned reading that struck them, provoked them, caused them to think or question. This placed the onus on group members to begin the sharing. This approach was rich in that it took the group into sections of the material that might not come up if with strict adherence to the "Thoughts" and "Questions" at the end of each chapter. Often, this part of the small group consumed the bulk of the meeting time. Other times it was fairly balanced between participants' reactions to the reading and their collective

sharing on “Thoughts” and “Questions” listed in HTH. If the “Thoughts” and “Questions” were edged out due to time, the group leader assigned a few questions to think about and then promised that these questions would be the opening for the next session. Similar to Group A, the conversations and interactions of Group B were active and enthusiastic. The outline of material discussed was as follows:

Week 1 (Group A, 02/01/23 / Group B, 02/07/23):

Session 1— “The New Normal” / “Why Do You Talk About Race So Much?”

90 minutes—Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Consent letters collected and reminder given to take the Pre-Project Survey ASAP for those who had not yet done so.

Week 2 (Group A, 02/08/23 / Group B, 02/21/23):

Session 2— “A Family for Abraham”

90 minutes— Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Week 3 (Group A, 02/15/23 / Group B, 02/28/23):

Session 3— “Jesus the Barrier Breaker and Family Maker”

90 minutes —Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Week 4: (Group A, 02/22/23 / Group B, 03/07/23):

Session 4 — “The Birth of God’s Multiethnic Family”

90 minutes — Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Held one case study interview

Week 5: (Group A, 03/01/23 / *03/07/23)

Session 5 — “Paul and the Early Church”

90 minutes— Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Held one case study interview

*Group B combined two chapters on 03/07/23

Week 6: (Group A, 03/08/23 /Group B, 03/14/23)

Session 6— “A Hole in Our Discipleship”

90 minutes—Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Week 7: (Group A, 03/15/23 / Group B *03/14/23)

Session 7— “Trust the Supremacy of Christ”

90 minutes — Review readings, discuss reflection questions

* Group B combined two chapters on 03/14/23

Week 8: (Group A, 03/22/23 / Group B, 03/21/23)

Session 8 — “Engage in Difficult Conversations / Collectively Mourn Injustice?”

90 minutes — Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Week 9: (Group A, 03/29/23 / Group B, 03/28/23)

Session 9— “Display Gospel Character / Affirm the Reconciler’s Creed”

90 minutes— Review readings, discuss reflection questions

Plenary Session with Derwin Gray via Zoom (Groups A & B combined, 04/26/23)

90 minutes—Presentation and Q&A with author of HTH (Food and fellowship between groups 30 minutes prior to session).

Following the final meeting of each group, participants were asked to complete a second survey (the “Post-Project Survey”). This survey was sent out to all participants on April 11, 2023. The Post-Project Survey intentionally included the same sixteen questions as the Pre-Project Survey, but it also added three questions designed to help measure the impact of participation in the groups. Questions were repeated so that responses from the first survey could be compared to the second survey to determine the effect of participation in the group and the members’ experience of lived diversity. A total of sixteen responses were received.

In addition to the small groups, interviews with the two Case Studies referred to above explored two individuals’ transition from homogeneity to diversity in their own faith journeys. These interviews were facilitated by me as Project Investigator. The following questions were used as prompts:

- Talk about your life journey from youth to now, including your spiritual journey and church involvement.
- Talk about experiences with diversity or lack of diversity along the way.
- Did your church experience prior to Garfield Memorial Church include diversity of members, leaders, protocol and thought?
- Looking back now, do you feel like something was missing?
- Since becoming part of Garfield Memorial Church and participating in further faith development and discipleship, has the diversity within the congregation impacted you? If so, how?

I, as Primary Investigator, took notes during these conversations. The notes were then compiled and analyzed. The results of both the Pre-Project Surveys and Post-Project Surveys were compiled and analyzed. Results of those surveys can be reviewed under Appendix 4 and Appendix 5.

An original goal for the project included sharing and receiving surveys from two homogeneous United Methodist Churches in North East Ohio and comparing them to a general survey to the larger body of Garfield Memorial Church. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Although the Lead Pastors from both churches agreed to have their leadership boards participate in this project, the national issue around disaffiliation with the denomination began to consume their leadership boards' time and energy in 2023, with votes on the matter anticipated in late spring and early summer. Participating in this study became impractical to them at the time of the project. Because this interaction could not take place, the larger general survey of Garfield Memorial Church for comparison became unnecessary as well. A concept for interviewing a few non-churched individuals regarding this topic was also discarded. While Garfield Memorial Church is well established as a church that reaches many non-churched individuals and the proposed interviews among the non-churched are a standard part of their outreach operating procedure, it was decided that the information gathered would be more relevant to evangelism than to spiritual formation.

During Week Five, the halfway point for this project, a participant proclaimed, "I am learning that diversity is the 'University for Growth.'" If there is a summary of what leaders and participants learned from this project that very well may be it. The goal of this project was to observe whether an intentional effort like these small groups might

elicit affective change. One of the spiritual earthquakes that must take place for individuals and churches to move from homogeneity into truly lived diversity is the development of a holy discontent. There must be an awareness that individuals have settled for something less than the “fullness” that Paul prays for in Ephesians 3:19. Cognitive change requires information and data: it is a revolution of the mind. Affective change requires vision and imagination. It involves an aesthetic experience of something “more,” prompting a revolution of the heart. As pastor and author Tim Keller said, “Religious people find God useful. Christians find God beautiful.”⁴ Paul prays that believers and members of Christ’s Church might see this beauty of God in its “manifold (multi-colored) wisdom... made known” (Eph. 3:10, *NIV*). This project helped reveal that an intentionally diverse community’s effort to explore the Biblical mandate and teaching for walking, working and worshipping together as one in lived diversity can broaden vision for what is the “breadth and length and height and depth... [of] the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:18-19a). It can create a restlessness of the heart yearning for more.

If lived diversity does in fact contribute to fuller and richer spiritual formation for individuals and churches, it should be pursued relentlessly. One of the revelations in conducting this project was that involving participants who had been part of a healthy multiethnic church for one to thirteen years had an element of “preaching to the choir.” This was not completely foreign or new material for them; they hear it preached almost monthly. Yet because this is difficult kingdom work that requires much personal

⁴ Tim Keller in sermon, “The Beauty of God.” Tim Keller Podcast by Gospel in Life. Transcribed by Podgist, Podcast Transcripts, October 10, 2022. <https://www.podgist.com/tim-keller-sermons/the-beauty-of-god/index.html>

sacrifice and goes against the grain of culture, both in the church and in American society, digging deep into this topic unearths underlying obstacles and tensions and requires new commitment or recommitment. If individuals and groups can self-assess that lived diversity contributes to their spiritual growth, they are more likely to continue to make that commitment.

The Pre- and Post-Surveys revealed some interesting data. (A breakdown of respondents' answers can be reviewed in Appendices D and E). In response to Question 1, participants were in one-hundred percent agreement that God's desire is for the local church to reflect the diversity of the Revelation 7:9 Church. The wording on Question 2 was a bit confusing, but the intention was to test whether individuals thought that the diversity of God expressed in homogeneous churches of different ethnicities scattered about the community and the world fulfilled God's desire to reflect Revelation 7:9, or whether that diversity needed to be reflected within the congregations of local churches themselves. 32% disagreed in the Pre-Project Survey. After the completion of the study, that number had grown to 45% saying that diversity of homogeneous churches in a geographic area or region does not go far enough. It was encouraging to see that in Question 8 on both surveys, the majority believed that it takes intentionality to foster lived diversity and cross-cultural relationships. When this question is asked in more secular forums, the baseline is closer to a 50/50 split, often leaning toward the sentiment that these relationships should just happen naturally. It appears that members of a healthy multiethnic church understand that this does require intentionality. The percentage of those agreeing that intentionality is required even saw a slight uptick in the Post-Project Survey. In both the Pre- and Post-Project Surveys, 94-96% of respondents

reported that being involved in a “diverse, multiethnic church” had contributed to their spiritual growth. The hypothesis that spiritual formation grows in the context of lived diversity both individually and corporately found the most support in the “comment” sections that demonstrated deeper reflection than simply gauging agreement or disagreement with general concepts. It was also on display in the answers to Question 16 on both the Pre- and Post-Project Surveys, as well as Questions 17 and 18 on the Post-Project Survey. Question 16 asked, “If you left Garfield Memorial Church and began to attend or join another church that had little to no diversity in its worshipping congregation or leadership, would you be comfortable?” In the Pre-Project Survey, 23% of participants said “Yes.” By the Post-Project Survey, that number had dropped to 6%. Question 17 in the Post-Project Survey asked if participants now had a better sense of the Biblical mandate and teaching for experiencing lived diversity in the church and 89% responded that they did grow in this understanding through these small group studies. Question 18 asked whether participation in this diverse small group and teaching on lived diversity had “furthered” their spiritual growth; 83% reported that it had.

In addition to the comments highlighted from small group conversations, the comment sections of these surveys may be the best barometer of affective change, albeit potentially less scientific. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Therefore, in measuring the heart and affective change, Jesus’ teaching may indicate that the comment sections of this study are the true treasure chest of data gathered. In summarizing the breadth of these comments, some general headings and themes emerged. First, general comments specifically articulated the hypothesis that spiritual formation does in fact grow within the context of lived diversity. Secondly, they

reflect evidence of this growth in spiritual formation in five areas: 1) An experience of new freedom out of an old spiritual bondage; 2) A wider vision; 3) An affective change—“something has grabbed my heart;” 4) New levels of theological understanding, especially around healing; and 5) A deeper and fuller appreciation of the sacraments.

General Admissions in Support of Hypothesis

Some responses to Question 9 on the Pre- and Post-Project Surveys, “What do you believe are the benefits and strengths of personally living a multiethnic life, including spiritually?” were revelatory in that they demonstrated that these small group experiences had taken the understanding of diversity from a general concept (articulated in the responses to the Pre-Project Survey) into a particularly important condition for spiritual growth (articulated in the responses to the Post-Project Survey). While there were a few references to “God” or “the Bible,” for the most part the Pre-Project Survey responses articulated more secular language around diversity. Responses included things like:

- “It encourages racial harmony.”
- “Helps to have more empathy toward our fellow man.”
- “It is a benefit to know as humans we have much more in common than we do differences.”
- “Opens me up to different perspectives.”

In the Post-Project Survey, however, the language became more theological and ripe with Biblical references indicating spiritual growth and discipleship. Note the following comments with emphasis added:

- “Our **spiritual growth and development are greatly enhanced** by the exposure we obtain from all of God’s people, the differences of their cultures and lifestyle.”
- “Broader awareness of the impact of various issues on more people than our own ethnicity. Being more prepared to support others... because of this awareness and understanding... Insight into our own biases, which can help us be **humble and repentant**.”

- “The saying that **iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17)** is good but... you can only be as sharp as the iron that sharpens you so being challenged to think differently by people with differences can be mutually beneficial.”
- “I think without **my brothers and sisters in Christ** who have lived a different experience because of their ethnicity and color, I would only be seeing the Father’s creation ‘**through a mirror darkly.**’ Togetherness in Christ leads to the development of a **Christ-lens** and a desire for **reconciliation** and repair of our broken society.”

Question 14 on the Pre- and Post-Project Surveys asked, “Give an example(s) of your own spiritual growth from being a part of a multiethnic church.” These comments permeated both Pre- and Post-Project Surveys, demonstrating the spiritual impact and exponential spiritual growth of those who had made the commitment to include lived diversity in their faith development for one to thirteen years. Written replies to Question 14 included the following (with emphasis added):

- “I have grown in compassion and empathy.”
- “Getting to know African Americans while studying the Bible has opened my eyes to their interpretation. This in turn has helped by **expanding my openness to hearing the word of God.**”
- “When part of a multiethnic church I feel more **valued, understood and trusted.** Growing up I was not in a multiethnic church and felt the complete opposite.”
- “This challenges me to live **less like a Pharisee...** with less judgment of others, but instead to lead with love and dive deeper into the **context and circumstances of the scriptures.**”
- “Seeing my discomfort as an area where God can help me grow... Being more aware of my own biases, which are **sinful**, allows me **to more quickly repent.**”
- “My faith journey has been dramatically accelerated.”

One individual stated that, “The more diverse your church is, the more clearly you can see God’s image on display.” This comment encapsulates Ephesians 3:10, 18–19 in its entirety.

Breaking Free From an Old Bondage

This study revealed that one of the clear obstacles for experiencing lived diversity in individual and corporate expressions of faith is that individuals and churches are swimming with old anchors. This was highly visible in Group A, where participants were more established in church culture dating back as far as seven or eight decades. The opening session of Group A included many confessions like this one: “There was no choice for where we went to church back then.” One individual shared that “I always went to the Black church. I didn’t know that there was an option.” Many shared that culture had been passed down through family and that family had shaped their individual and corporate lives of faith around homogeneity.

Even in Group B, there were confessions of a captivity to blindness and cultural insensitivity. One younger white female said, “I grew up as a Caucasian blind to racial tension.” Her white husband confessed that “Race was not something that was talked about growing up, as my parents did not know how to address it or feel the need to address it.” One white male shared that in his professional life he heard colleagues say “racism is bad” in public arenas, and yet privately were content to share racist views and inappropriate humor. A white woman shared about adopting her African American son fourteen years ago in the context of “white suburbia” and hearing statements that were extraordinarily painful. She shared that “layers and layers had to be peeled off of my eyes.” An African American male shared how he had been promoted to General Manager of his company and how white males began to express indignation with him, exuding their cultural captivity to the belief that it was “not right to take orders from a

black man.” A male member of Group B also shared that as a Pilipino man he did not fit in anywhere in the Church or culture.

The theme of “breaking free” from old conceptions, prejudices and biases appeared throughout this project. New freedom is a central tenet of spiritual growth. Jesus said, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36); and Paul writes that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (3 Cor. 3:17). One response to Question 14 in the surveys stated:

The people that were part of my life for so long had it all wrong! Garfield has made church a safe place for people to come together and share their ideas, life stories, and love for God. It is a place of love, healing, honesty and a place where I feel safe enough to share and grow.

Another response to that same question was, “I now have a compassion for others who have not lived with the privileges I have taken for granted.” One young African American male confessed that he always thought of diversity as simply between black and white until participating in this group and hearing his “Pilipino brother’s story.” He said, “I have been set free to experience a greater depth of understanding of God’s love.” Three young females in Group B, two white and one African American, expressed feelings of new freedom as lived diversity has entered their life through the multiethnic church and this specific group. One white female shared that she “felt unfinished as I have been challenged and deconstructed in areas that I never knew.” Another white female expressed liberation, saying that, “I feel extremely lucky that I came here [Garfield Memorial Church] because this was **not** what I grew up in.” The young African American female shared that, “I feel free here after being in a legalistic background to now explore and expand.”

Derwin Gray writes, “The American Church has co-opted God’s story and shrunk it to an individualized reduced salvation of Jesus only dying for *my* sins. But Jesus died for *your... my... and the world’s* sins” to create a “unified family.”⁵ This is the liberation that many in the group were experiencing.

Wider Vision

Years ago, a short book by Bruce Wilkinson entitled *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* became extremely popular in the Church at large. It was based on a little prayer nestled in 1 Chronicles 4 that began with the words, ‘Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory’ (1 Chron. 4:10, *NIV*). Wilkinson wrote that this was Jabez’s prayer for “unclaimed blessings” from “God’s plenty.”⁶ Unfortunately, many “prosperity preachers” quickly interpreted this as purely financial gain, but I have always seen that prayer as something more. What if the prayer to “enlarge my territory” was a call to broaden my vision to God, others, the world and widen my circle to include those different from me? This widening of vision was experienced and articulated by members of the small groups in the study. Again and again, people spoke of seeing with “new eyes.” Seeing through a “Jesus lens” became common nomenclature in Group B, and all confessed that they had never used that term before. One male in Group B shared succinctly with the group in week nine, “I am no longer seeing you and others around me through the [his name] lens but through the Jesus lens.” A long-time, extremely active African American male church member in Group A

⁵ Derwin Gray, *How To Heal Our Racial Divide*, 41.

⁶ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2010), 16.

said that he was somewhat shocked that his involvement in this group “brings things to light that I never thought of before. My eyes have truly been opened.” A white male in Group B had always thought when “Jesus said, ‘I came to let the oppressed go free’ (Luke 4:18) that it meant those who were the victims of oppression. But this study together has taught me (he got a little choked up here) that Jesus came to free the oppressed *and* the oppressor.” It was a new vision to not see himself as above or beyond the oppression, but as part of it and as part of the emancipating work that Christ was doing in the midst of it. An older white male member of Group A commented that he had a “stay away attitude” in the past, avoiding difficult conversations or situations. “Now,” he said, “I have learned to be more aware of myself and go beyond my comfort zone to engage others who might think and act differently from me.”

This new and wider vision moved from the individualistic into the collective. When conversation turned toward the Church’s mission to the diverse world and its call to be an agent of reconciliation, Group B unanimously agreed with this participant’s comment: “I now see that if you are in a mono-ethnic community, you won’t have the ability to do that.” Another from that same group said, “I now have the benefit from learning from diverse others and more perspective through which to see the world.”

Affective Change: “Something Grabbed My Heart”

With new vision came new perspectives, and with new perspectives a whole new world of feelings, empathy and emotions emerged. The Lutheran-raised individual mentioned above shared his testimony during the introductory time of the first session of

Group B. He declared, “I came here to get my daughter baptized and leave, but God relentlessly pursued me through this church. Something grabbed my heart.”

Refer again to the comment above in response to Question 14 of the surveys: “I **feel** more valued” as part of the multiethnic church.” Lived diversity gave individuals the ability to widen their vision and see the beloved community. It was the affective change of the heart that enabled them to muster the courage to enter into that diverse community and stay with it. In John 3, Jesus tells Nicodemus that two things would happen when he was “born again” or “born from above.” First, he would be able to “see” the kingdom of God (John 3:3), and then he would be able to “enter” into it (John 3:5). The affective change of the heart is a sign of new birth and the beginning of entering into residency in God’s beloved community. Several participants said that they felt like they were being “recycled.” Lived diversity is a catalyst for this. White members in the groups began to use the language of brother and sister, sibling language that is common and natural in the Black Church community. They laughed together and shared how moving it was to do so.

This affective change led to new cultural empathy. In the session tied to Gray’s chapter entitled “Collectively Mourn Injustice” in HTH, a member of Group A looked at his new African American family and friends in the group and said with great passion, “What would it look like for me as a white man to show up and mourn with you? I haven’t been taught that.” That same night, one member noted that “proximity creates intimacy.” Hearing about racism on the news is one thing, but it hits home when heard through the words and the life experience of a brother or sister in Christ. The relationships in Group B give a sign of lasting affective change. Prior to this study, few

people in Group B knew one another intimately. Most were only casual acquaintances through church attendance. They planned on meeting regularly for the rest of 2023 at the very least. During the last session, one participant said through tears, “It breaks my heart for what we as different cultures have missed.”

New Levels of Theological Understanding

The experience in these particular small groups caused a depth of theological thought and Biblical inquiry among participants that appeared unique when contrasted to more typical “Bible Studies,” especially those in homogeneous contexts. Members of Group A found themselves asking Biblical questions that had never arisen for them before, even though this group has met in regular weekly Bible Study for thirteen years. Questions like, “What ethnicity was Abraham?” “Was Abraham a Jew, or since he was called to start a new people, what was he before?” “Did Moses really have a black African wife?” This group initially struggled a bit more in this study, as some had pre-conditioned mindsets about God, faith, Bible and church. Yet, there was an endearing, almost childlike hunger for things that some had never heard before that was reminiscent of Peter’s words, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2-3). Though several felt fairly Biblically literate, they confessed to discovering a new revelation of God’s heart for lived diversity among God’s people and the Church. Two responses from Group A in the Post-Project Survey to question 19 regarding their own spiritual growth as being part of this project were:

- “I have a new awareness of the many, many ethnic groups discussed in the Bible. It was not just one ethnicity like it had been portrayed to me before in previous churches.”
- “I never realized that the early Christian church was all about breaking down ethnic barriers.”

Group B began to think in fresh ways theologically as well. They entered a long discussion along the way of Derwin Gray’s use of “*Healing Our Racial Divide*” in his title. They noted that previously they had thought it was our job to “bridge” the racial divide, so simply attending a diverse church could accomplish that. Participation in this group helped them understand that there was a need for healing, which far surpassed simply getting diverse people in the same room. They reflected upon healing as central to Christ’s earthly ministry and a key component of instruction for what his disciples were to do when he sent them out (Luke 9:2). An African American male member of Group B shared with group members, “As a black man I always have to heal from something. I walk around with a heaviness and pain, but rarely do I have an environment outside my race to talk about it. I always have to have my guard up. This group feels safe though, and it’s liberating.”

The group spent much time in prayer and reflection as this truth appeared among them. They confessed that they had known that the racial divide needed to be removed or bridged, but now they saw that a fundamental component to reconciliation was the need for healing. The sense that the removal of division and separation was a central part of Christ’s earthly ministry and commissioning for his followers became much more clear. A member of Group A said that, “I know now that the real problem is Satan. I’m not fighting against flesh and blood.” A young, professional African American female shared that the topic of this group resonated with her. She stated that, “I don’t like being

categorized in boxes, I resist labels, even though they are always placed upon me, especially in my professional life. In this study I have seen that other women had labels placed upon them in the Bible— a woman who was a sinner, the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery, etc. —but Christ was there for all of them and all of us to tear those labels down.” In the latter weeks of the study, members of Group B had an “aha moment” noting that the “sin of exclusion” follows the “sin of disobedience” (Gen. 3:22–24). They concluded that our tendency to exclude and our separation from one another across racial and other lines is a result of our “fallenness.” The depth of novel theological inquiry and thought that emerged in nine short weeks was definitive evidence of the effect of lived diversity upon spiritual formation.

Deeper Appreciation for the Sacraments

Members of both small groups on many occasions articulated experiences of catching a kingdom vision or “tasting and seeing” (Ps. 34:8) the value of lived diversity at Garfield Memorial Church’s Baptism Sundays and / or Communion Sundays. These events were referred to with great reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28) and as conduits for affective change in their spiritual journeys. In these groups they were able to dig down to the spiritual roots of those experiences. One session when I was away participating at a national conference, this topic again came to the forefront. The individual taking notes during that session for Group B is a self-confessed introvert. When he transcribed this part of the session, he burst into personal testimony writing, “*My thought*— This section was perhaps the most positively emotional and Spirit-led, in my opinion. There was clapping, there were tears. I could feel God moving us in this moment.”

Garfield Memorial Church is a mainline church that offers two distinct forms of worship experiences. The “Heritage” service is a worship experience that honors the traditions of the Western Church with liturgy, hymns, Chancel Choir and message. The “Mosaic” worship services present the gospel in a more modern experience. All participants in Group B happened to attend one of Garfield’s modern Mosaic services. Critics of modern worship often accuse it of devaluing the sacraments and watering down tradition. This study revealed that lived diversity may ignite a more powerful understanding of the sacraments that transcends the form, fashion or ritual of their delivery. This group decided collectively that the sacraments are the place where “Jesus is most easily and clearly revealed” to them. Their comments were:

- “In the multicultural movement, this is where you truly see the vision of the Revelation 7:9 church.”
- “On Baptism and Communion Sundays is where multicultural worship blossoms, and we see hope and new life.”
- “It’s the best vision of the kingdom we get in the context of ‘Now I see through a mirror dimly’ (1 Cor. 13:12).”

The group even proposed that communion is the *antidote for racism!* Lay members rotate at Garfield Memorial Church, taking turns leading stations to serve communion via intinction. One group member shared about her first experience of serving communion and how moving it was: “I was able to see the whole church and how beautiful it was in all of its diversity.” The “Jesus lens” depiction returned as one member of the group said that these sacramental moments help us to “Seek to see people through the lens of Jesus, through the gift of the body of Christ and the connection in the body of Christ.” One member of the group shared that at her baptism she felt the presence of God in a powerful way. She said as she arose from the waters and saw hundreds in the church standing and cheering, she knew that “Love is the color of worship.” Through the sacraments they

witnessed the building of a family, what 1 Peter 2:9 calls “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people.” In many branches of the Christian faith traditional tasks and exercises are practiced as preparation for baptism and communion (the only two sacraments practiced at Garfield Memorial Church as a United Methodist Church. This group’s comments and experience surrounding the sacraments give evidence that lived diversity so profoundly impacts spiritual formation that the case could be made that it has a deeper and more lasting impact than even the form or fashion through which these sacraments are offered.

Post-Script: Two Individual Case Studies

The two individual case studies revealed the small groups’ discoveries in a more intimate and personal way. As shared above, one of the individuals is an African American retired engineer and high-level executive from Rockwell Automation. He will be referred to as “Retired Executive” to protect anonymity. The other is a prominent national church leader of a frontline church organization, as well as the founding and long-time lead pastor of one of the largest multi-campus megachurches in Ohio. He will be referred to as “National Church Leader.” Both are actively involved at Garfield Memorial Church presently, along with their spouses. Retired Executive has been at Garfield Memorial Church for thirteen years and has served as Chairperson of the church’s Board of Trustees for the past ten years. National Church Leader is fairly new to Garfield Memorial Church, having been there now for a year.

Retired Executive shared that his church life began in a traditional African American Baptist Church at the insistence of his mother. He was baptized at the age of

twelve, but after his parents became divorced, he lived with his father and did not attend church in his teenage years. During his first marriage, he attended a Seventh Day Adventist Church that was a homogeneous African American congregation. Three years after his divorce, he married the love of his life. They have been married now for forty-five years and are both active at Garfield Memorial Church.

His professional life was an utter contrast to his former church experience, as Rockwell Automation was a corporation that was 98% white during his tenure there and was one of only two black directors. Up until the time that he and his wife found Garfield Memorial Church, he was not regularly attending or active in any church. He visited occasionally, but always to a homogeneous African American Church. Coming to Garfield Memorial Church bridged his personal and professional life experiences and he said that, "It felt like the environment that the church was supposed to be." He shared that his largest area of spiritual growth in being part of Garfield Memorial Church was that, "I have grown so much in my love of my neighbors... *all* of my neighbors." Like the members of the small groups (of which he was a part), he expressed that his high holy moments have been on Baptism Sundays. "Something happens inside of me" on those days that he said he cannot explain. He and his wife insist on volunteering on Baptism Sundays, assisting baptismal candidates getting into and out of the pool and distributing towels. His son died shortly before this interview took place, and he shared that he still had to come out and assist at a Baptism Sunday only weeks after his son's death. He said, "I can't explain it, I just needed to be there, I needed to be next to the pool." He is a member of Group A in this study and has been part of the "Foundations" group for thirteen years. Ironically, the leader of that group is a former Caucasian colleague of his

at Rockwell. Their offices were right next door to one another as fellow directors, but they did not share much beyond work in the way of friendship. He said, “We were divided by one wall for ten years and now we are good friends and brothers in the same small group at church! Go figure.”

National Church Leader’s story is a far different one. He grew up in an all-white community in Ohio. He only encountered one person of color during his school years, who was an exchange student from Brazil who attended his high school. National Church Leader attended a Bible college in southern Ohio, an institution that was all white except for one African American student. He went to Dublin, Ireland to plant a church and at that time, Dublin was a nearly all white city and region. Returning to the United States, he planted what would turn into a thriving megachurch in an Ohio township whose demographics are still 97% white in 2023. Thirteen years ago, he and his wife adopted their African American son as an infant. Eleven years ago, he transitioned from his position as Lead Pastor of the church to his current role as President of a leading national church training and planting organization. He shared that four years ago, the whole concept of “Kingdom diversity” awakened in his soul. He recognized that his background and the organization he now led were extremely white in makeup and culture. He contracted with I.D.I (Intercultural Development Inventory) whose mission is to “facilitate personal growth and insight and collective change in ways that improve people’s intercultural competence and their efforts at bridging cultural differences so that relationships are strengthened and the human condition is enhanced.”⁷ Training for the

⁷ See I.D.I website under “About Us” and “Our Mission” - <https://idiinventory.com/about-us/our-mission/>

entire team and board of this national church organization was initiated. A watershed moment for him was when his I.D.I. coach, who happened to be an African American Christian, told him, “You can’t stay where you are at and become the person God wants you to be.” This led him to reshape the culture of the organization he leads and prompted him and his wife to move to a place of greater diversity in Cleveland, Ohio, where they have become part of a more diverse church community at Garfield Memorial Church. He related strongly to the Zone of Proximal Development theory discussed in Chapter 5 and shared that they had moved into a zone of proximity with diverse neighbors intentionally. He stated that his mindset had been shaped to help and heal people of color, but now he and his wife are experiencing the joy and freedom of being helped and healed *by* people of color. He now finds that being in non-diverse, homogeneous spaces is almost intolerable. He expressed two areas where he has seen firsthand how lived diversity has helped his spiritual formation grow more into fullness (Eph. 3:19). First, he said, “I have taken off the sunglasses... now, I don’t see ‘them,’ I just see ‘us.’” Second, “I am more filled with joy than ever before through an obedience to God and a proximity to diversity.” The testimonies of these two individuals are echoes of the small group members’ experiences of a “wider vision” and an “affective change of the heart.”

In conclusion, the data and scope of this project indicate that lived diversity in individual and corporate contexts is a powerful contributor to furthering spiritual formation and discipleship. In hindsight, I would have solicited outside help in constructing the survey questions. The survey questions could have been better constructed and more consistent around the hypothesis of this project. The project was successful, however, in measuring the affective change that occurred in the participants,

drawing evidence from the well-documented comments and conversations. Participants shared clear expressions of the effect that lived diversity had on their spiritual formation. The consistent themes of a wider vision, deeper and richer theological thought and a greater appreciation and understanding of the sacraments are stark evidence of this spiritual growth and transformation. Even though participants were already active in a healthy multiethnic church, taking this time to intentionally study, reflect and examine the concept of lived diversity in one's spiritual journey deepened their understanding of just how impactful that experience had been upon their spiritual lives. They boldly expressed their commitment or re-commitment to making sure that lived diversity remained a consistent and concrete component of their walk of faith. This path is not easy, nor is it always comfortable. As Garfield Memorial Church reminds its members: 1) You have to be comfortable being uncomfortable and 2) You will like 70% of what happens here, but know that when you are in your 30% someone else is in their 70%.

There will be difficult conversations along the way, as there were at times difficult conversations in these groups. The author included an entire chapter on this topic in HTH. These difficult conversations were handled in a respectful, grace-based way, but they were not without casualties. Three participants chose not to continue in the project, two after week one and one after week five. When Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34), Luke adds the term, "Take up your cross *daily*" (Luke 9:23, emphasis added). None of this sounds like a call to "comfort." Participants in this project acknowledged that this was difficult spiritual work. One member of Group B, echoing Luke 9, said, "This ship sails every day." All agreed that this involves personal sacrifice,

but that the sacrifice is worth it as it leads to a fuller and deeper walk with Christ. This project and paper encourages readers to seek out diverse groups like this to have these conversations and build relationships beyond cultural borders. Sheryll Cashin's book, *Loving*, written on the fiftieth anniversary of the Loving case in Virginia which eliminated anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, opens with this line: "To love beyond boundaries is the most radical of acts."⁸ It is exactly that most radical act of love that Jesus modeled and called all of his followers to live out. Real, meaningful spiritual growth and formation take place when followers of Christ answer this call in tangible ways. The reformed Pharisee, Saul, who became the bridge-building apostle, Paul, is a concrete reminder of this. Gray points to this truth as he ends his book HTH with the words from this former enemy of "ethnic others," who later wrote to the church in Philippi:

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. (Phil. 2:1-4, *NLT*)⁹

Paul's spiritual life was reshaped by lived diversity, individually and corporately. The participants of this project shared that their spiritual lives had been reshaped—or in their words, "recycled"—by the presence of lived diversity in their life of faith as well. The emphasis of this project and paper is that all followers of Christ might pursue this end "on

⁸ Sheryll Cashin, *Loving: Interracial Intimacy in America and the Threat to White Supremacy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2017), 1.

⁹ Derwin Gray, *How To Heal Our Racial Divide*, 267.

earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10), thereby presenting a visible foretaste of Christ’s consummate Church clearly illustrated in Revelation 7:9.

APPENDIX A

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY INFORMED CONSENT FORM

United Theological Seminary Informed Consent Form

Investigator Name: Chip Freed

Contact Information: 216-235-8469 / chip@garfieldchurch.org

Garfield Memorial Church – 3650 Lander Rd. Pepper Pike, OH 44124

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary.

Purpose: I am conducting a study on the importance of experiencing “lived diversity” in our individual and corporate spiritual lives.

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you are an active participant at Garfield Memorial Church.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to be part of an eight-week small group. Groups will meet for 90 minutes once a week from February 1 – March 29, 2023. Groups will do weekly reading in preparation for group meetings, respond to reflection questions and / or journal entries.

Human Subject participation:

All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study. For example, children who are under 18 years old must have permission from their parents/ guardians. And for women who are pregnant or may become pregnant during the study, they must provide a doctor’s note for their safety, since they are considered a protected class (i.e., vulnerable population) by the Federal Law.

Risks:

The physical risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Emotional risks may be encountered as sensitive topics around race and racism will be involved.

Benefits:

This project will benefit churches and individuals in discovering the joy of “lived diversity” and its impact on our spiritual formation. It will also assist in ending ethnic segregation within too many churches.

Voluntariness:

Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your relationship with Garfield Memorial Church. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality:

We will be careful to keep your information confidential, and we will ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. Notes will be taken during our conversations at small group meetings. These will be transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The

files will be encrypted and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used.

Summary:

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me.

Signature:

Signing this document means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to
Participate in the Project/Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B: PRE-PROJECT SURVEY

Appendix B: Pre-Project Survey

1

I believe that God's desire is for the local church to reflect the kingdom of heaven with people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

2

I believe that the kingdom of heaven with people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9) is reflected in the combination of all churches on earth, e.g., black church, white church, Korean church, Hispanic church, etc., generally; not necessarily within a multiethnic local church.

Disagree Strongly

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

3

In my interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, my faith grows.

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

4

If I had more regular interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, I believe that my faith would grow more.

Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

5

I am growing in my relationships with people of different races, ethnicities and cultures.

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

6

I am growing more concerned with social justice issues.

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

7

I have questioned and continue to question my own cultural biases and prejudices when situations arise.

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

8

Which of these statements better reflects your belief about cross-cultural relationships:

I believe people need to be intentional about developing cross-cultural relationships

I believe cross-cultural relationships should just happen naturally

9

What do you believe are the benefits and strengths of personally living a multiethnic life, including spiritually?

10

Systemic and institutional racism are a reality in the United States.

Agree

Disagree

Unsure

11

If you agreed to the question above, have you seen or heard examples of “systemic or institutional racism?” Please explain

12

What do you believe are the benefits and strengths of being a part of a multiethnic church?

13

My involvement with a diverse, multiethnic church at Garfield Memorial Church has contributed to my spiritual growth

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

14

Give an example(s) of your own spiritual growth from being part of a multiethnic church

15

Give an example(s) of your own growth personally and spiritually from living a multiethnic life beyond the church

16

If you left Garfield Memorial Church and began to attend or join another church that had little to no diversity in its worshipping congregation or leadership would you be comfortable?

Yes

No

Uncertain

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C: POST-PROJECT SURVEY

Appendix C: Post-Project Survey

1

I believe that God's desire is for the local church to reflect the kingdom of heaven with people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

2

I believe that the kingdom of heaven with people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9) is reflected in the combination of all churches on earth, e.g., black church, white church, Korean church, Hispanic church, etc., generally; not necessarily within a multiethnic local church.

Disagree Strongly

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

3

In my interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, my faith grows.

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

4

If I had more regular interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, I believe that my faith would grow more.

Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

5

I am growing in my relationships with people of different races, ethnicities and cultures.

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

6

I am growing more concerned with social justice issues.

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

7

I have questioned and continue to question my own cultural biases and prejudices when situations arise.

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

8

Which of these statements better reflects your belief about cross-cultural relationships:

I believe people need to be intentional about developing cross-cultural relationships

I believe cross-cultural relationships should just happen naturally

9

What do you believe are the benefits and strengths of personally living a multiethnic life, including spiritually?

10

Systemic and institutional racism are a reality in the United States.

Agree

Disagree

Unsure

11

If you agreed to the question above, have you seen or heard examples of “systemic or institutional racism?” Please explain

12

What do you believe are the benefits and strengths of being a part of a multiethnic church?

13

My involvement with a diverse, multiethnic church at Garfield Memorial Church has contributed to my spiritual growth

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

14

Give an example(s) of your own spiritual growth from being part of a multiethnic church

15

Give an example(s) of your own growth personally and spiritually from living a multiethnic life beyond the church

16

If you left Garfield Memorial Church and began to attend or join another church that had little to no diversity in its worshipping congregation or leadership would you be comfortable?

Yes

No

Uncertain

17

I have a better sense of the Biblical mandate for the multiethnic church due to my involvement with this small group experience focused on diversity

Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

18

My Involvement in this small group experience focused on diversity has furthered my spiritual growth

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Agree Strongly

19

Give an example of your own spiritual growth from being part of this small group experience.

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D: GRAPHS OF RESULTS OF PRE-PROJECT SURVEYS

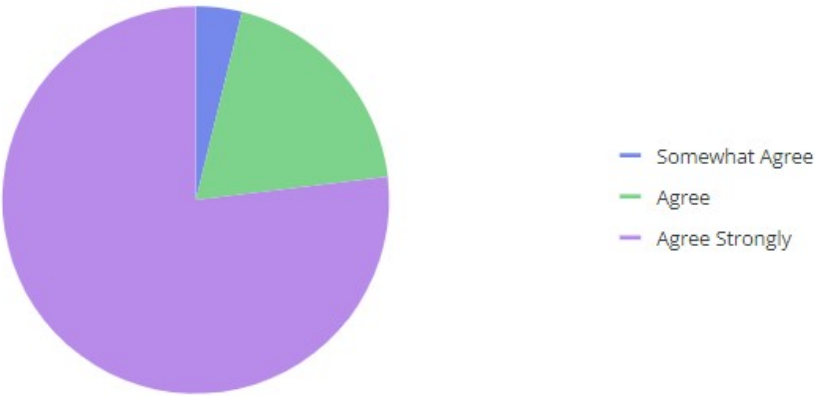
Appendix D: Graphs of Results of Pre-Project Surveys
(Specific survey question number listed in top left corner of graph)

1



I believe that God’s desire is for the local church to reflect the kingdom of heaven with people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9).

26 Responses



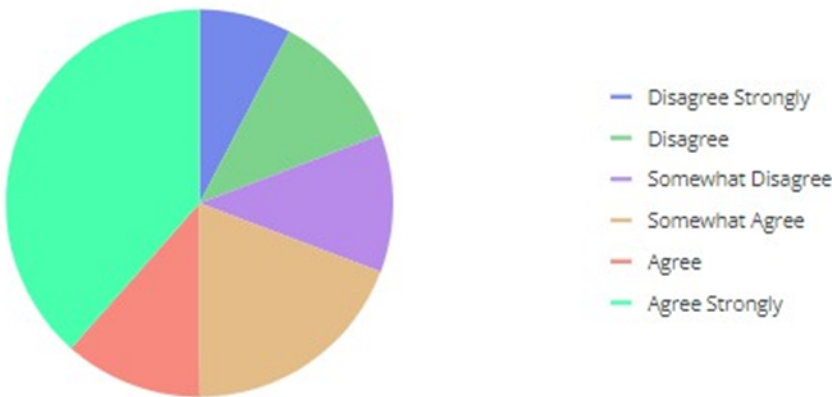
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Agree	1 (4%)
Agree	5 (19%)
Agree Strongly	20 (77%)

2



I believe that the kingdom of heaven with people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9) is reflected in the combination of all churches on earth, e.g., black church, white church, Korean church, Hispanic church, etc., generally; not necessarily within the local church.

26 Responses



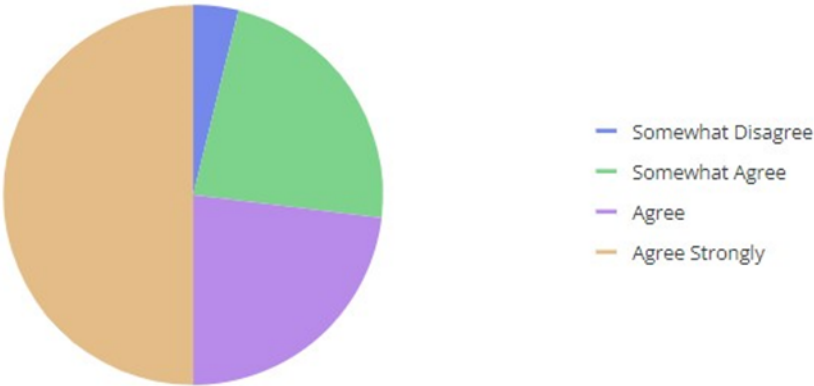
Answers	Responses
Disagree Strongly	2 (8%)
Disagree	3 (12%)
Somewhat Disagree	3 (12%)
Somewhat Agree	5 (19%)
Agree	3 (12%)
Agree Strongly	10 (38%)

3



In my interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, my faith grows.

26 Responses



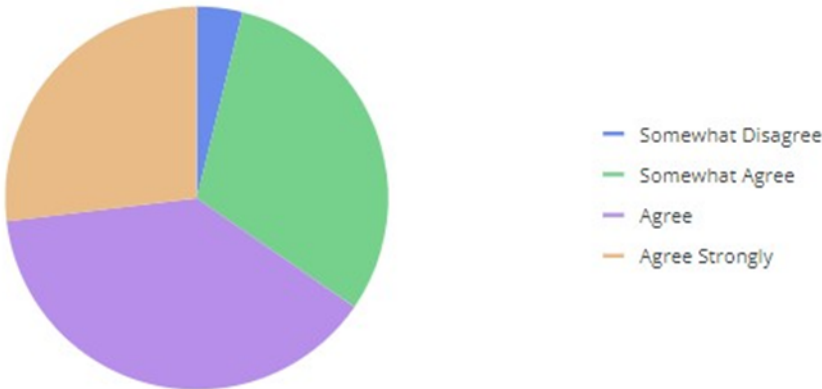
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Disagree	1 (4%)
Somewhat Agree	6 (23%)
Agree	6 (23%)
Agree Strongly	13 (50%)

4



If I had more regular interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, I believe that my faith would grow more.

26 Responses



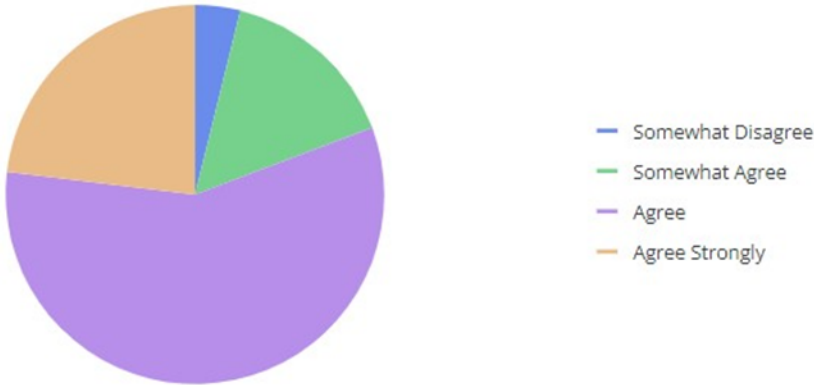
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Disagree	1 (4%)
Somewhat Agree	8 (31%)
Agree	10 (38%)
Agree Strongly	7 (27%)

5



I am growing in my relationships with people of different races, ethnicities and cultures.

26 Responses



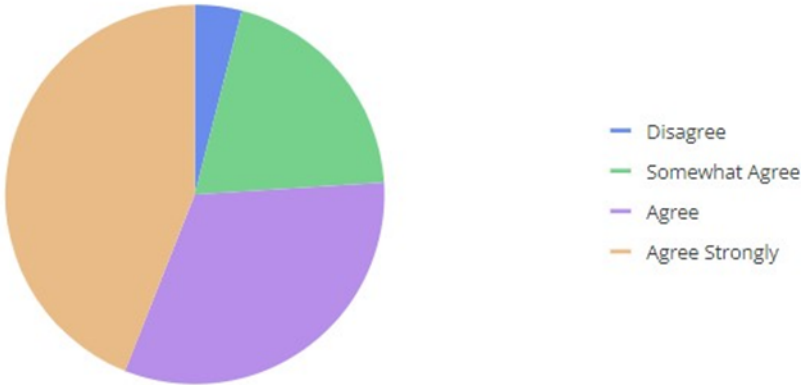
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Disagree	1 (4%)
Somewhat Agree	4 (15%)
Agree	15 (58%)
Agree Strongly	6 (23%)

6



I am growing more concerned with social justice issues.

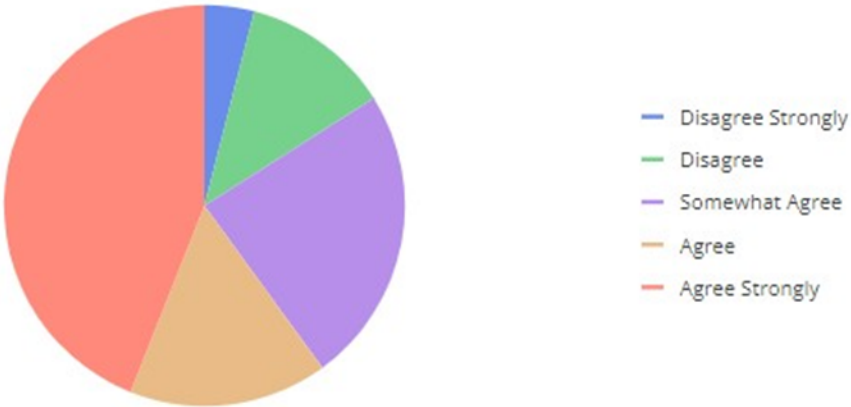
25 Responses



Answers	Responses
Disagree	1 (4%)
Somewhat Agree	5 (20%)
Agree	8 (32%)
Agree Strongly	11 (44%)

I have questioned and continue to question my own cultural biases and prejudices when situations arise.

25 Responses



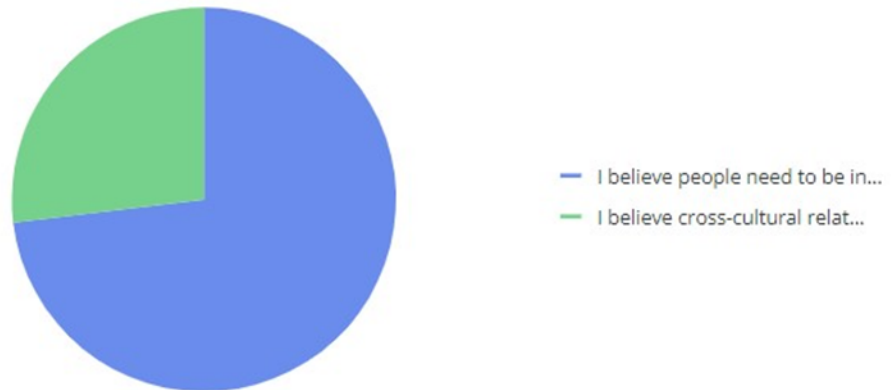
Answers	Responses
Disagree Strongly	1 (4%)
Disagree	3 (12%)
Somewhat Agree	6 (24%)
Agree	4 (16%)
Agree Strongly	11 (44%)

8



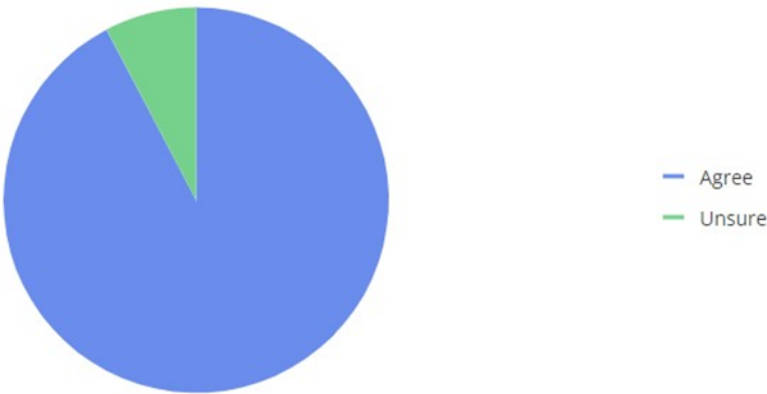
Which of these statements better reflects your belief about cross-cultural relationships:

26 Responses



Systemic and institutional racism are a reality in the United States.

26 Responses



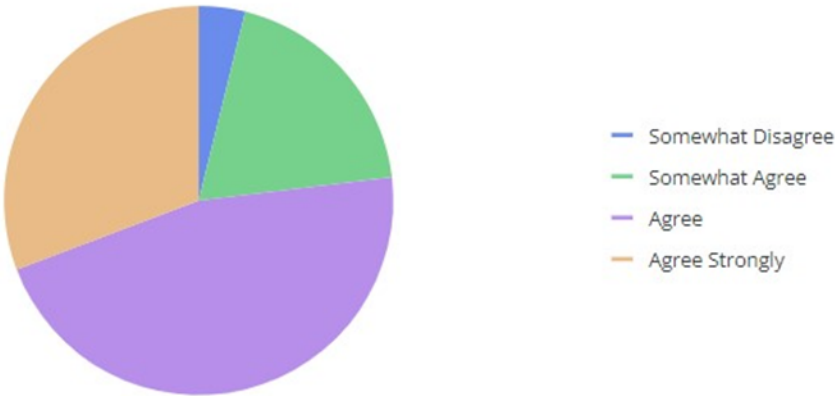
Answers	Responses
Agree	24 (92%)
Unsure	2 (8%)

13



My involvement with a diverse, multiethnic church at Garfield Memorial Church has contributed to my spiritual growth

26 Responses



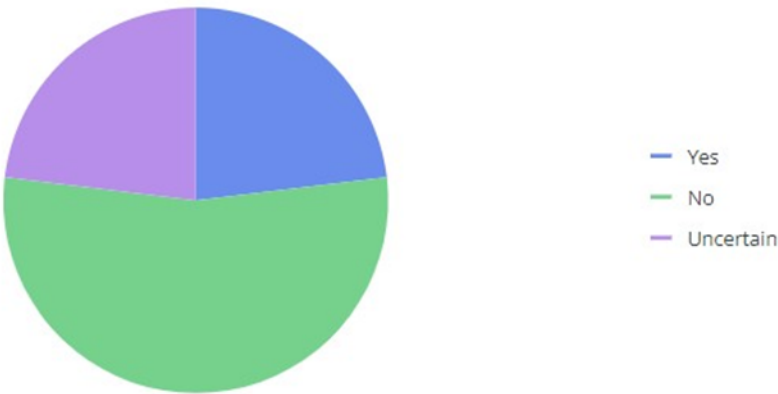
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Disagree	1 (4%)
Somewhat Agree	5 (19%)
Agree	12 (46%)
Agree Strongly	8 (31%)

16



If you left Garfield Memorial Church and began to attend or join another church that had little to no diversity in its worshipping congregation or leadership would you be comfortable?

26 Responses



Answers	Responses
Yes	6 (23%)
No	14 (54%)
Uncertain	6 (23%)

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX E: GRAPHS OF RESULTS OF POST-PROJECT SURVEY

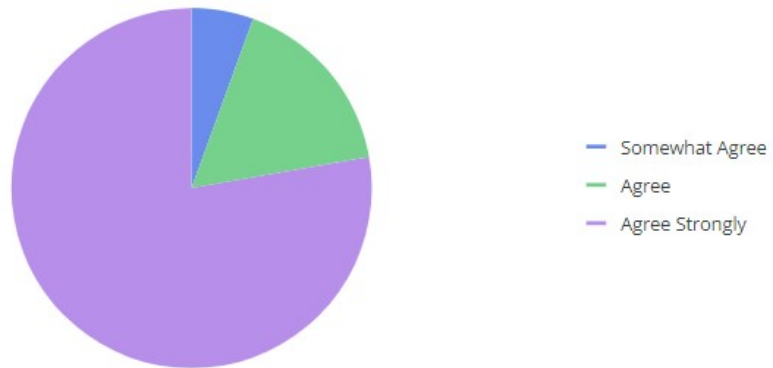
Appendix E: Graphs of Results of Post-Project Survey
(Specific survey question number listed in top left corner of graph)

1



I believe that God's desire is for the local church to reflect the kingdom of heaven with people "from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9).

18 Responses



Answers

Responses

Somewhat Agree

1 (6%)

Agree

3 (17%)

Agree Strongly

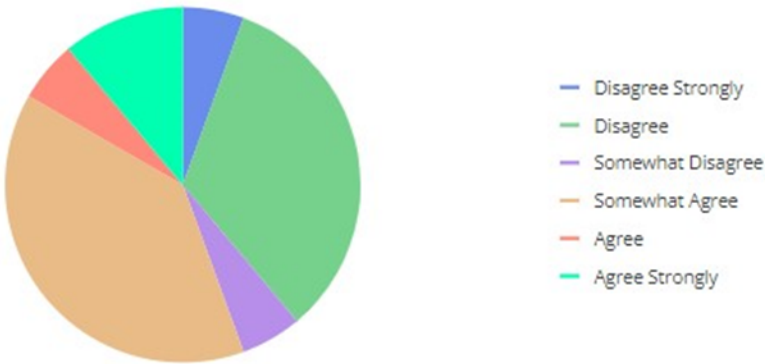
14 (78%)

2



I believe that the kingdom of heaven with people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9) is reflected in the combination of all churches on earth, e.g., black church, white church, Korean church, Hispanic church, etc., generally; not necessarily within a multiethnic local church.

18 Responses



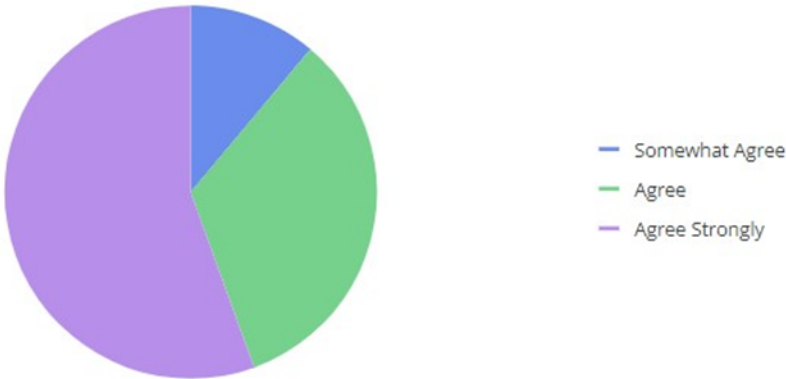
Answers	Responses
Disagree Strongly	1 (6%)
Disagree	6 (33%)
Somewhat Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Agree	7 (39%)
Agree	1 (6%)
Agree Strongly	2 (11%)

3



In my interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, my faith grows.

18 Responses



Answers	Responses
Somewhat Agree	2 (11%)
Agree	6 (33%)
Agree Strongly	10 (56%)

4



If I had more regular interactions with Christians from different races, ethnicities and cultures, I believe that my faith would grow more.

18 Responses



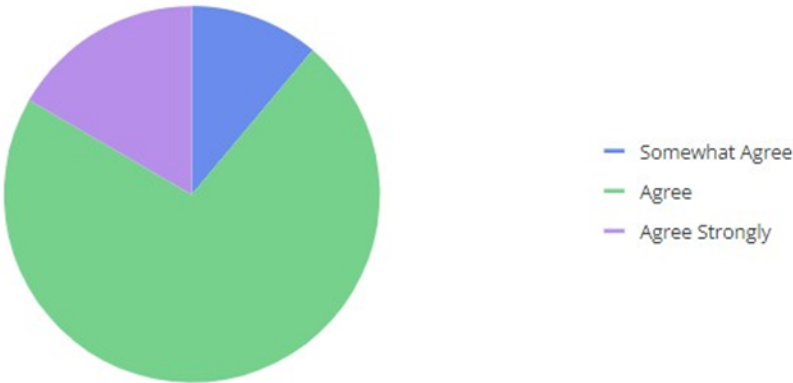
Answers	Responses
Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Agree	6 (33%)
Agree	4 (22%)
Agree Strongly	7 (39%)



5

I am growing in my relationships with people of different races, ethnicities and cultures.

18 Responses



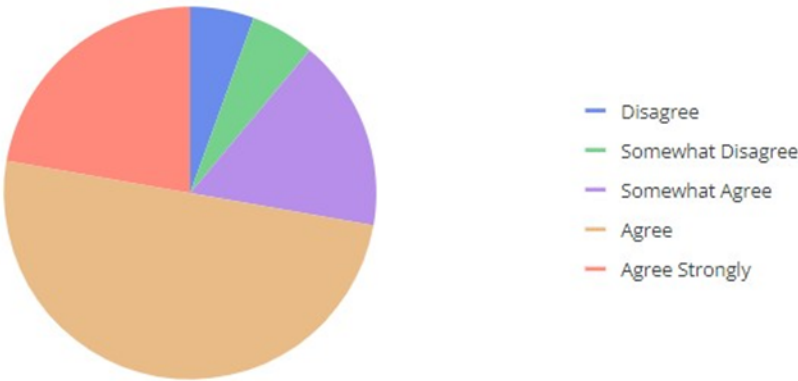
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Agree	2 (11%)
Agree	13 (72%)
Agree Strongly	3 (17%)

6



I am growing more concerned with social justice issues.

18 Responses



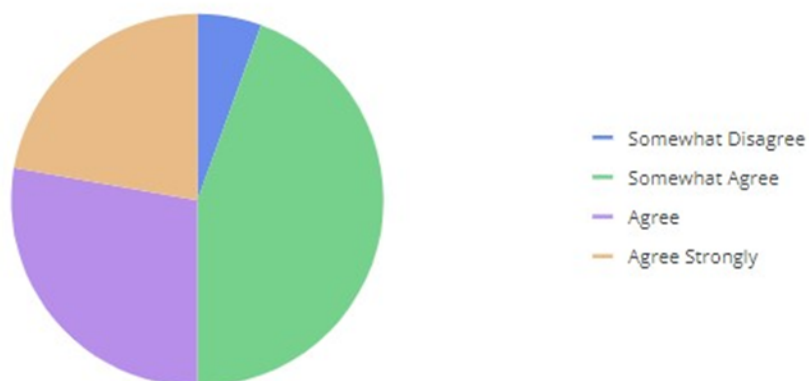
Answers	Responses
Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Agree	3 (17%)
Agree	9 (50%)
Agree Strongly	4 (22%)

7



I have questioned and continue to question my own cultural biases and prejudices when situations arise.

18 Responses



Answers

Responses

Somewhat Disagree

1 (6%)

Somewhat Agree

8 (44%)

Agree

5 (28%)

Agree Strongly

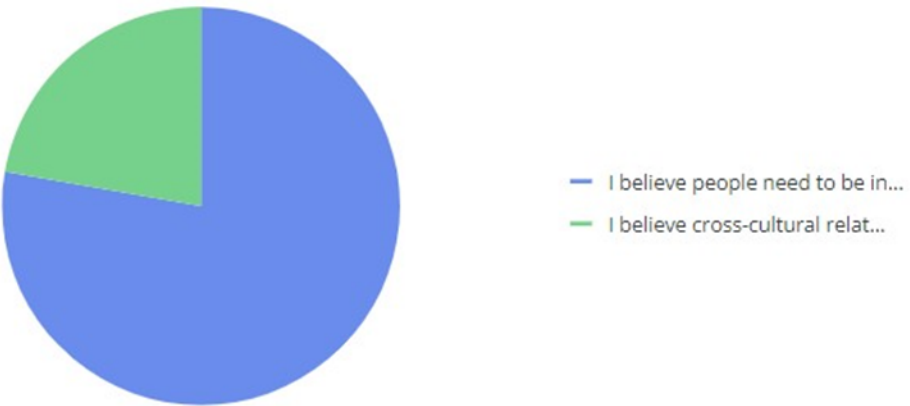
4 (22%)

8



Which of these statements better reflects your belief about cross-cultural relationships:

18 Responses



Answers

Responses

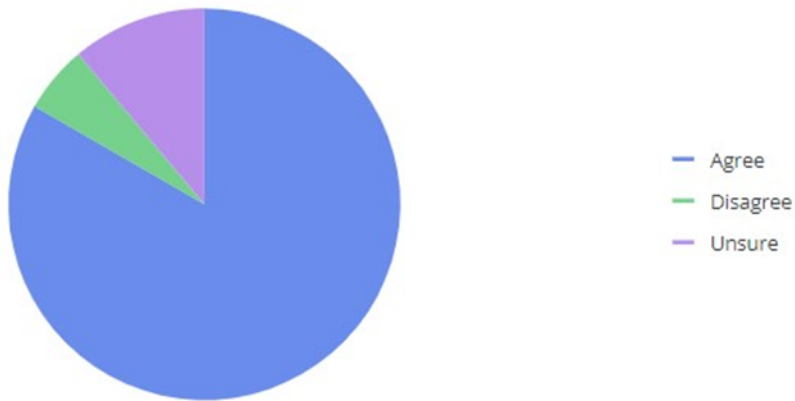
I believe people need to be intentional about developing cross-cultural relationships	14 (78%)
I believe cross-cultural relationships should just happen naturally	4 (22%)

10



Systemic and institutional racism are a reality in the United States.

18 Responses



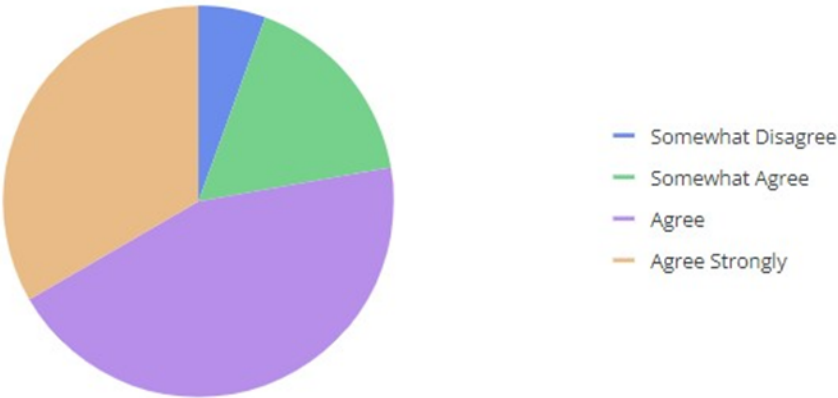
Answers	Responses
Agree	15 (83%)
Disagree	1 (6%)
Unsure	2 (11%)

13



My involvement with a diverse, multiethnic church at Garfield Memorial Church has contributed to my spiritual growth

18 Responses



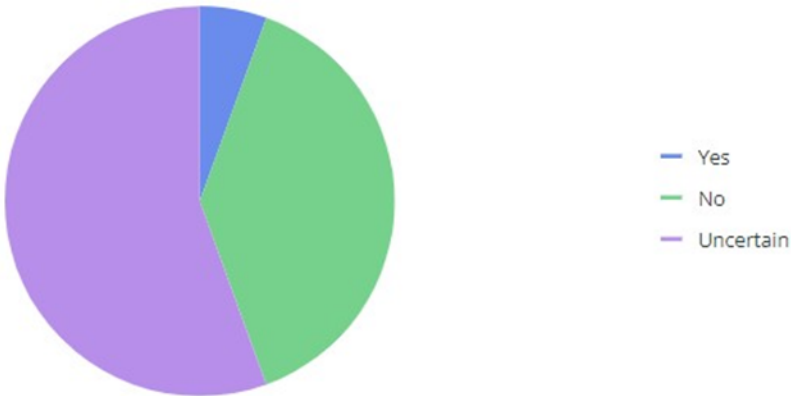
Answers	Responses
Somewhat Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Agree	3 (17%)
Agree	8 (44%)
Agree Strongly	6 (33%)

16



If you left Garfield Memorial Church and began to attend or join another church that had little to no diversity in its worshipping congregation or leadership would you be comfortable?

18 Responses



Answers	Responses
Yes	1 (6%)
No	7 (39%)
Uncertain	10 (56%)

17



I have a better sense of the Biblical mandate for the multiethnic church due to my involvement with this small group experience focused on diversity

18 Responses



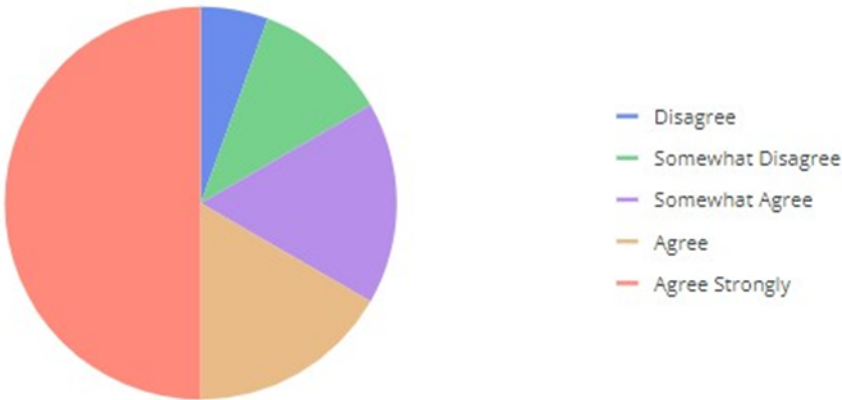
Answers	Responses
Disagree	2 (11%)
Somewhat Agree	3 (17%)
Agree	6 (33%)
Agree Strongly	7 (39%)

18



My Involvement in this small group experience focused on diversity has furthered my spiritual growth

18 Responses



Answers	Responses
Disagree	1 (6%)
Somewhat Disagree	2 (11%)
Somewhat Agree	3 (17%)
Agree	3 (17%)
Agree Strongly	9 (50%)

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